žvaigždė

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žvaigždė

by cannibalspectacle

Summary

Žvaigždė (noun) — Lithuanian for “star.” Hannibal Lecter discovers that his newest fascination, one Special Agent Will Graham, comes with some rather adorable, curly-haired baggage. This changes everything.

drive

Chapter Notes

> twitter fannibals bullied me into posting my dumbass little dad!will snippets (also known as the hambleverse apparently) on ao3 so they're all in the same place/attached. these won't be in chronological order and will be posted as i think of them and with mistakes, probably, but oh well.

Hannibal wakes to the sound of his phone ringing, and he has half a mind to let it go to voicemail until he spies the name on the screen. Why would Will be calling him at — He glances at the time — 3:30 in the morning? He tries to shake the grogginess from his voice as he picks up. "Will?"

A moment of silence. A decidedly childish sniffle. Then a soft, watery, "H-Hamble?"

"Adam?" Alarm has him fully awake in an instant, sitting up and climbing out of bed without thinking. "Where is your father, Adam?"

"I dunno," and that is definitely a note of fright creeping into his voice. On instinct, he finds himself pulling on a sweater as the boy continues, "The doggies woke me up, but it's dark out, it's not time to be awake yet. So I went downstairs, and Daddy's not here. Winston neither."

Will would never leave Adam alone, never dream of taking such a risk, even if Adam was asleep. Even the faintest chance of Adam waking up and being alone, afraid, is something Will would not allow. For that exact thing to have happened, something must be very wrong. Hannibal slips on the nearest pair of shoes and heads out of his room, towards the stairs.

"Daddy's not here," Adam repeats, tone pitching upwards in panic, ragged little gasps that verge on sobs ripping out of him, "Daddy's not—"

"Adam," Hannibal interjects before the boy can work himself up further, "Listen to me. Are you listening?"

Another sniffle, but the shaky "Yes, Hamble," is a de-escalation from rising hysteria, so Hannibal is willing to count that as a small victory. He grabs his keys from the little dish by the door and heads out the door.

"Good boy." Hannibal sets his phone to speaker mode and places it in the passenger seat as he climbed into the Bentley. "I'm on my way to you right now, alright?" He considers, briefly, the sheer impracticality of driving from Baltimore to Wolf Trap at 3:30 at night, but it's only a momentary thought that flits, mothlike, through his mind before he promptly

dismisses it. Impractical, inconvenient or not, the Grahams need him, and so he will go. "Until I get there, I want you to play a game with me."

"Wha— What game?" He can still hear the threat of tears in that soft little voice, but at least he's not teetering on the edge of a panic attack.

"I want you to copy my breathing. In for four counts, hold for four counts, out for four counts. Do you think you can do that, Adam?"

"Uh-huh," Hannibal could hear the dogs whining softly, recognizing and echoing Adam's distress. That they were there with him, at least, was a small comfort. At least Adam wasn't entirely alone. The dogs adored Adam, and he was very much safe in their company. They would protect him, should the need arise.

"Copy my breathing, like this, Adam," he says, and demonstrates, exaggerating the sounds to make them clear through the phone. Adam mimics him obediently, and before long he is breathing calmly, despite the tension still buzzing through Hannibal.

Around the halfway point of the drive, Hannibal hears the dogs whine, the sound of footsteps and a door closing. "Daddy's back," Adam says, voice hushed, "But he went right to bed. I dunno if he even saw me."

"I'll be there soon," Hannibal assures him. Returned or not, something is clearly the matter with Will, and he intends to look after them both. It could be a symptom of his encephalitis, he realizes. It's a rare symptom but one that has been noted. Strange how he'd not considered before how letting the illness blossom might frighten Will's son. Had not considered how Adam's distress would bother him. After all, he was not trained in pediatric psychiatry or medicine. The last time he had been much exposed to children was when he'd been a child himself.

The dogs greet him at the door, milling about his legs with soft whines. They are unsettled by Will's nocturnal wanderings, but they know Hannibal. As Adam had told him, Will is asleep, flopped across his bed without having bothered to crawl under the covers. Adam, for his part, is curled up in a chair by Will's bed. His curls are fluffy and untamed, clearly tousled in his sleep, and he wears a set of pajamas with feet, patterned to look like an astronaut's spacesuit. The skin around his eyes is red, puffy, and Hannibal can see the tracks of dried tears on his cheeks, but he sits calmly.

It's oddly charming, the sight of this quiet, serious little creature with huge eyes and messy curls.

"Hamble!" He squeaks, and scrambles down from his chair. Hannibal isn't sure what he'd expected Adam to do when he arrived, but Adam surprises him by darting across the room to fling his arms around Hannibal's legs, burying his face in the fabric of his pajama pants.

"Hello," Hannibal says, because he isn't quite sure what one is meant to say to a kindergartener currently trying to wrap himself around one's legs.

morning

Will wakes to a voice. Usually, his wake-up call is the dogs whining to be let out, but this morning he hears a voice he doesn't recognize at first. It's alarming. He sits up, trying to figure out how someone got in and how he could fight them off. Then he rubs his eyes just to be sure he's seeing what he thinks he is.

Hannibal Lecter is sitting in his easy chair, in a pair of pajama pants and a sweater, with Will's dogs gathered around his feet and Will's son in his lap. It's his voice Will had heard, soft and rhythmic in a way that Will has come to associate with storytelling.

"... but Jūratė's father, Perkūnas, the god of thunder, discovered that his beloved daughter had fallen in love with a mortal. And do you know what he did?"

"No," Adam gasps, and Will can only see half his face, but the way he's gazing up at Hannibal, so trusting and enraptured, assures Will. Adam is safe and secure with Hannibal, even if Will isn't sure why he's here. "Tell me."

"Well, Perkūnas was very angry with Jūratė for falling in love with Kastytis, because he had promised her to another god. So he used his lightning bolts to strike Jūratė's beautiful amber palace, destroying it and killing Kastytis."

"Oh no," Adam's voice is hushed, sorrowful. Will is just about to scold Hannibal for telling his son a story that ends in death and destruction, before he's stopped with such force that he feels like he's been struck with lightning himself.

Because Adam, perched in Hannibal's lap, leans his head against the psychiatrist's chest, a little nuzzling motion that he uses to self-soothe. And Will had known, without really absorbing it, that Adam had been touching Hannibal before Will woke — Adam did not tolerate touch from those he didn't want to be touched by, if he was in Hannibal's lap, it was because he chose to be — but to *see* Adam initiate contact, with someone other than Will for the first time, floors him.

"Oh no indeed," Hannibal says seriously, not aware of the magnitude of what has just happened, "As punishment, Perkūnas chained Jūratė to the ruins of her palace at the bottom of the sea. And she's stayed there for eternity, weeping for her lost love. Supposedly, on stormy nights, you can still hear her crying if you listen closely. The amber that washes up on the shores of the Baltic Sea is said to be the shattered remains of her palace. Some even say that they're Jūratė's tears."

"Why would her daddy be so mean to her? Kastytis made her happy. Jūratė's daddy should want her to be happy."

Hannibal hums softly in agreement, and something in his expression as he looks down at Adam, soft and fond and almost wondering warms Will deep in his chest.

I'm gonna marry that man.

The thought floats into Will's mind so naturally, so dreamily, that it startles Will to stop and recognize it. What the hell, he mentally shrieks at himself, He's your therapist! He's your coworker! It's completely inappropriate! So what if he's gorgeous and understanding and your kid who doesn't like anyone likes him? So what if he looks at you like he wants to eat you alive and you want to bang him like a screen door in a hurricane? It's not appropriate. *Bad Will. Bad!*

But the sight of Hannibal in Will's house, in his pajamas, holding Will's son, feels so utterly right that he can't help but imagine what it might be like to wake up to this every day. To Hannibal's low, thickly-accented morning voice, to Adam content and cared for, slow, lazy mornings full of sunlight and peace.

Will wants it, wants it so badly that he aches.

"Good morning, Will," He jumps at the serene but unexpected greeting, hears Hannibal's rumbling chuckle make a pleasant counterpoint to Adam's high giggle.

"What are you doing here?" He asks, rubbing the back of his neck to hide his sheepishness.

"Hamble made pancakes," Adam chirps, which is great, but not a real answer to Will's question. He's fairly certain Hannibal didn't drive all the way to Wolf Trap just to make pancakes for Will's kid.

"You don't remember anything from last night?" Hannibal asks, and oh boy does that *not* make Will feel good. Silently, he shakes his head. Hannibal frowns, glances down at Adam.

Will says quickly, "Adam, why don't you go and work on your rocketship?" With a little squeal of delight, Adam hops down off Hannibal's lap and scurries for the stairs, the dogs following after him. Hannibal looks at Will curiously

"He has a rocketship?"

"He has a cardboard box, markers, and duct tape. What happened last night?"

Hannibal looks anxious. He doesn't think he's ever seen Hannibal look anxious before. "You started sleepwalking in the night. Right out the door and down the road. Adam woke up, he was frightened when he couldn't find you. He found your phone, managed to hit redial on the last number you called."

Jesus Horatio Christ. Will bites back the urge to swear, mindful of the little ears not that far away. He'd never sleepwalked before, why the fuck would he start now? And to actually leave the house! Anything could have happened to Adam. Anything could have happened to Will. For just a moment, he imagines what might have become of Adam, had Will been injured or even killed, and it chills him to the bone.

"He called you."

"Yes."

“And you came, in the middle of the night.” It sounds ridiculous in his own ears. If Hannibal weren’t right in front of him, proof that it had happened, he’d never believe that someone would do a thing like that.

“I was concerned, for Adam’s safety and your own. My conscience would not allow me to stay away, not knowing how you fared.” Hannibal’s dark eyes are lit and warmed by the morning sunlight, and Will is struck again by that intense, overwhelming urge to claim him, keep him.

Marry me, he wants to blurt out*, You’re beautiful and brilliant and willing to drive 50 miles in the dead of night because a five year old called you. My kid hates touch and he clings to you like a teddy bear, and I think I might be in love with you. Please, please marry me.*

Beating back his impulses, Will only says “Thank you,” trying to pour all his gratitude and relief and affection into the words. Hannibal’s answering smile is wide, and they both laugh when Adam’s voice carries down the stairs:

“Daddy! Hamble! Are you done having a grownup talk?”

hurt

Adam loves going to dinner at Hamble's house. He didn't think he would, at first, because it wasn't what they always did, and Adam liked things to be orderly and predictable. And Adam was what his daddy called a picky eater. So they usually just ate at home. But they had been invited, and Daddy said it would be rude to refuse without even trying.

And Hamble had surprised them. He'd made some fancy grownup food for himself and Daddy, but for Adam, he'd made mac n cheese. It wasn't the kind that came out of a box, it was homemade, and Hamble called it something fancy, but it was mac n cheese all the same. It was very tasty, and when Daddy saw it, he looked at Hamble with such a big smile Adam was worried his face might split in half.

So it became part of their routine. Twice a week, on Tuesday and Thursday, they went to dinner at Hamble's. Hamble lets them help cook, even Adam, who has to be held up to reach the countertop and stir. Daddy and Hamble still have fancy grownup meals with funny names and weird smells, but Adam's food alternates between fancy mac n cheese and fancy chicken. Hamble sometimes talks about getting Adam to "expand his palate" but he never pushes Adam to try anything he doesn't want to, and Adam appreciates that.

Adam wakes up and for a moment, he's scared -- He doesn't see Daddy anywhere, or the dogs, and he isn't quite sure where he is. Sitting up, he's about to call for Daddy when he realizes he's in Hamble's living room, on his couch. The room is much easier to recognize when he's right-side-up. But why was he sleeping on Hamble's couch? This isn't where he usually sleeps. Adam must have been really sleepy to drift off without his normal bedtime routine. But if he was that tired, why didn't Daddy just take him home? It's weird and confusing and Adam doesn't like it one bit. And as soon as he finds Daddy, he'll tell him so. Daddy has been very bad, making Adam's routines go all lopsided like this. Maybe Adam will put Daddy in time-out. That sounds good.

He climbs down from the couch and heads off to find his daddy. It's only when he reaches the hallway that he realizes his plan might be flawed. For one, Adam has never been in Hamble's house without someone to tell him where to go. And for two, Hamble's house is big, with lots of rooms, and Adam has no way of knowing which room is the one Daddy's in. What if Adam goes looking for Daddy and Daddy goes looking for Adam and they just get all turned-around with all the doors, like in Scooby-Doo?

Just when all the static and Wrongness is starting to build up in his head at the thought of being lost in Hamble's house forever, he hears a noise. It comes from down the hall. That must be where Daddy and Hamble are. He shuffles down the hallway, but once he reaches the door, he faces another problem. He's supposed to knock when there's a closed door. And this door is almost closed, but not actually shut all the way. He hesitates for a few moments before deciding that he could look through the gap in the door without opening it, so he could make sure Daddy was there without breaking any rules. He creeps closer, as quiet as he can, and presses his face to the gap between the door and the doorframe.

Hamble is sitting at his desk, the big sturdy thing that doesn't look anything like Adam's desk at school. Adam's daddy is… sitting in Hamble's lap? Adam sits in Daddy's lap all the time, and sometimes in Hamble's lap, but he's never heard of a grownup sitting in another grownup's lap. It seems odd, like it shouldn't be a thing that happens. But there Daddy is, sitting on Hamble's lap, his arms around Hamble's neck like a hug. And they're… kissing. But it's not like any sort of kisses Adam has seen, the pecks on his cheek or forehead that Daddy gives him, or the loud, smacking kisses that his babysitter gives him there when they play.

This kissing is on the mouth, and it's long and slow. The two of them are holding onto each other like if they don't one of them might float away. After what feels like a million years, Hamble pulls back. Adam can hear them breathing, now, both of them panting like the dogs do when it's hot outside or they run a lot. "Will," He says, and Adam knows that's Daddy's name, but he doesn't hear it much because they aren't around other people much.

His voice is raspy and rough, like Adam's voice is when he has a sore throat. He wonders if Hamble has a sore throat. If he does, he probably shouldn't be kissing Adam's daddy like that. He could get Daddy sick, and who would take care of Adam if Daddy was sick?

"Yes," Daddy says, and his voice is rough like Hamble's. Adam really hopes Hamble isn't getting him sick. Hamble hadn't even asked a question for Daddy to say yes to, and that's just weird. "God, yes, Hannibal."

Hamble ducks his head, and Adam thinks for a moment that he's kissing Daddy's neck -- A strange place to kiss, he thinks, but he can ask Daddy about it later -- but then Daddy makes a sound that Adam, even with his trouble identifying other people's feelings, recognizes as a pain sound, and before he can think about it, Adam is jolting forward, the heavy door he pushes through hitting the wall with a loud *thunk.*

"Adam?" Hamble sounds choked, and his eyes have gone very wide. Daddy leaps off Hamble's lap so fast he almost falls against the desk, and when he turns, Adam thinks he might just shake apart with rage. Because on Daddy's neck is a wet red mark, standing out sharp against his pale skin. Adam has lived around dogs his whole life, has seen bite marks before. *Hamble. Bit. Daddy*.

Adam sees red, flies forward with a shriek, his little fists already flailing even though he can't reach Hamble. How could he do this? How could he look after them and cook them tasty food and make Adam's daddy smile wider than Adam's ever seen, and then turn around and *hurt him?*

"Adam, baby, Adam," Daddy is saying, catching him around the waist and lifting Adam to his chest. But Adam doesn't want to be held and soothed. He wants to hurt, to hit and scratch and *bite*, to make Hamble pay for making them trust him just to hurt Daddy. Hamble is standing, now, coming closer, and Adam screams at him for his nerve, making him take a step back and look at Daddy like he's not sure what to do.

"Adam," Hamble says, soft and careful like Daddy talks to new dogs, "Do you remember the breathing game we played before? Do you think you can do that for me again?"

"No!" Adam yells, struggling against Daddy's hold in his desire to strike out and hurt Hamble. *"You hurt my daddy! I hate you!"*

Hamble sucks in a breath hard, like Adam's actually hit him.

"Adam," Daddy croons in his ear, low and soft, rocking Adam like a little baby, "Adam, sweetheart, it's alright. I'm okay, I promise. Hannibal didn't hurt me, baby."

"He *bit* you," Adam cries, even though arguing is bad, because he knows it happened, he saw it, and how can Daddy say Hamble didn't hurt him when Adam knows being bit hurts?

"Only a little," says Daddy, and that doesn't make sense, because there's *bit* and there's *not bit* but he's never heard of being *only a little bit.* Adam's head hurts, and he feels weirdly dizzy. His ears are ringing, he can't breathe right. There isn't enough air in the world. Where did the air go?

"I think he's having a panic attack," Hamble tells Daddy, but his voice sounds far away, and Daddy's arms tighten around him, like Adam's weighted blanket but even better. Daddy says a bad word, even though Daddy never says bad words in front of Adam, and Adam will have to remember to remind him later that bad words aren't allowed. Hamble reaches for him, and Adam wants to bat his hand away, to bite it maybe, but he can't seem to make himself move. So he lets Hamble's hand rest on his head, tucks his face into Daddy's chest, and lets the sleepiness take him.

boundaries

Chapter Notes

TW for this chapter: Homophobia, mentioned pedophilia (in the context of translating the bible), Christianity, and Beth Buchwald in general

It takes Beth a while to figure it out. Later, Adam thinks that maybe he should have told her everything right at the beginning, that night Beth told him about her family, but at the time he just hadn't thought to. She had asked "What does your dad do?" And Adam had replied that his dad taught at the FBI Academy, because that *was* what his dad did. And since Beth didn't ask about a second parent, he left it at that.

Until a couple months later, when Adam is in the middle of explaining a recent study that examines the psychological effects that long-term space missions have on astronauts and Beth interjects with "How do you know so much about psychology?"

Irritated to be interrupted in the middle of a sentence, Adam says, a little sharper than he should, "My papa is a psychiatrist. He thought learning about how minds work would help me understand and interact with people whose brains are different from mine."

Beth's brow furrows, and she bites her bottom lip. Adam has known her long enough now to recognize that face means Beth is trying to figure out how to tell him he's not doing something right. Which doesn't make sense, because Adam isn't *doing* anything.

"I thought you said your dad was a teacher."

"Dad *is* a teacher."

The furrow deepens. Adam wonders if it would smooth out if he rubbed it with his thumb, the way Dad used to rub dirt off Adam's cheek when Papa wasn't looking. Beth stares at him for a long silence — Adam counts eight Mississippis, definitely longer than most pauses in conversation are supposed to be comfortable — before saying, "You're not making sense, Adam."

Adam gnaws on his lip, trying to figure out where he'd miscommunicated. She'd asked how he knew psychology, he told her about Papa being a psychiatrist, and she'd brought up how he'd said Dad was a teacher… *OH*.

"My dad is a teacher at the FBI Academy," He says, speaking slowly to be sure he's understood, "And my papa is a psychiatrist. They're two different people." He pulls out his phone to show her his lockscreen, a photo of his fathers at the observatory. Dad has his head

thrown back, laughing so hard he's all but folded in half, and Papa is watching him with a smile so wide it makes his eyes crinkle and squint.

Adam loves that picture, loves how he can almost feel the love between them even through a simple frozen image of the moment. How their love is so strong and clear that Adam, who has always struggled to identify what others are feeling, has never for a moment questioned it.

"Oh," Beth says, and her lips are pursed like she's eaten something sour. "That's… nice." And Adam wants to believe her, but something about the tenseness around her eyes and her sour-taste lip pursing makes him think she doesn't really think it's nice. He *hates* when people say things and mean other things.

"It is," he says instead of pointing it out, "They're great fathers."

"What happened to your mom?"

Adam blinks at her until he realizes that what seems like a sudden subject-change to him must seem a natural follow-up to Beth. He was born, so he must have a mother, and it hasn't occurred to Beth, with her perfect nuclear family, that perhaps his mother simply hadn't wanted to be part of his life.

"Um, nothing *happened* to her, exactly. Except me, I guess. She just… didn't want to be a mother. Dropped me on Dad's doorstep a few days after I was born, and hasn't been heard from since."

"That's horrible, I'm so sorry." Beth gasps, and she reaches out to lay a hand against Adam's shoulder. It's supposed to be comforting, he knows, but it doesn't feel very comforting. It makes him want to squirm, makes him feel like there are ants crawling under his skin where her palm sits.

A voice that sounds like his papa whispers in his brain, *"Boundaries are important, žvaigždė. If you aren't comfortable with someone touching you, you don't have to let them, but you need to make it clear to them.*" Adam steps back, letting Beth's hand hang for a moment in the air before she lowers it.

"You don't need to be sorry," He tells her, "It's not like I ever knew her. She didn't want to raise a baby, so she didn't. And I ended up with my dads, so that's good."

"Uh-huh." Beth usually keeps her eyes on his face, trying to catch his eye, but now she won't look at him, staring down at her hands rather than at Adam, fidgeting.

"You're uncomfortable," Adam realizes, studying her, "Why are you uncomfortable?"

"I'm not," Beth says, even though everything about her body language screams uncomfortable so loud that even Adam can read it without really looking for it.

"Please don't lie to me," Adam replies. He has to be direct about his wants and expectations to other people, to be certain they understand each other. That's what his dads always say.

And Adam hates liars, even more than he hates strangers touching him.

“Okay, I’m a little bit uncomfortable. But it’s just that… well, it’s against my religion.”

“... Not lying is against your religion?” He’s never heard of a religion that encourages lying, but he’s never cared much about religions, so maybe there’s a pro-lying faith he simply hasn’t heard of.

“No, Adam,” Beth sighs heavily, the way Dad sighs when he gets a phone call from Uncle Jack when it’s really late or really early. “I… homosexuality is a sin. It’s in the bible. Man shall not lie with man as he lies with woman.”

Oh, alright. Adam has heard about that before. His dads taught him about it when he was young, warning him that being the autistic child of a same-sex couple would make his life harder than other kids’ lives. They also taught him what to say.

“That’s actually a mistranslation,” he informs Beth, “Originally, that passage said that man shall not lie with boy. It was a warning against pedophilia. It was just changed over time as it was translated into different languages. Jesus didn’t really say anything about gay people.”

Beth blinks slowly, and something in her expression makes Adam feel like his skin is on too tight. He wants to itch, to pull on his skin until it loosens, but he can’t.

“It’s not right,” She says, and her voice makes him think of the teachers he had when he was in school, the ones who thought that his disability made him stupid, or childlike even as he grew up. “It’s just not right.”

“Jesus had two dads,” Adam points out, “He had his, uhh, biological father, the… the one upstairs, and he had his stepfather, who raised him. And according to your bible, he turned out alright.”

Beth is still staring at him, and he hears his papa’s voice again. *“Boundaries are important, žvaigždė.”*

“I think you need to go home now, Beth.”

what's in a name?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal has to pick Adam up. Will had been held up at Quantico by Jack, but Hannibal had been allowed to leave, so Will had asked him to get Adam from school. It was a simple enough request, Hannibal having been added to the list of people approved to pick him up months ago, shortly after the sleepwalking incident. But Hannibal had never actually done it before.

It was ridiculous for him to be nervous. He was Hannibal Lecter, renowned surgeon and psychiatrist. The Chesapeake Ripper, *Il Mostro di Firenze*. He could end a life without so much as an uptick in his heartbeat. Why should the notion of retrieving a five year old from kindergarten make him anxious?

And yet, even as he wonders, the answer comes to him. He worries, illogically and impossibly, that the staff there will look at him and somehow see him, somehow know. That they will declare him unfit to care for Adam, even for the menial task of just taking him home. It's an irrational thought, Hannibal knows. His public persona, his person suit, is impeccable. No one can see through it, except perhaps Will, someday. His carefully-crafted image would not fail him so spectacularly. Still, the very possibility that it might, however remote and improbable, lingers and nags at him like the slow drip of a leaky faucet.

When he arrives at Adam's school, he checks in with the secretary and signs Adam out. Under the slot in the form requesting *relationship to child,* he writes *family friend.* Then he has to wait for Adam to be brought to the office from his classroom.

When the office door opens again, it reveals a young woman who must be either Adam's teacher or a classroom aide. Unconsciously, he finds himself analyzing, profiling — Late twenties, probably just out of school, not yet worn down by years on the job. Fresh-faced, pretty, but nothing remarkable. Too much perfume, likely to counteract hours in the company of children still young enough to not care much about personal hygiene. Something floral and overly, artificially sweet.

Holding her hand is Adam, and the smile on the boy's face when he recognizes Hannibal makes a warm sort of pride flutter deep in him. "Hamble!" He chirps, hurrying over with his backpack slung over one shoulder. He flings his arms around Hannibal's leg in greeting, and the young woman's polite smile turns indulgent.

"Well, Adam," She says, bending a little, "Is this your friend, then?"

Adam giggles, looking up at her as if she'd asked him if the sky was purple or something equally as nonsensical. "No, silly! This is my papa."

All Hannibal's concurrent trains of thought come to a screeching halt. As he's blinking down at the wide-eyed little boy in front of him, Adam seizes his hand and tugs him toward the

door with a nonchalant “Come on, Hamble!” as if he didn’t just flip Hannibal’s world upside down.

Will laughs when Hannibal tells him about it later, but there are tears in his eyes when he kisses him.

“I had to keep him safe,” Will says, and despite the snow, he’s sweating. Standing on Hannibal’s doorstep, he doesn’t even have a coat to protect him from the cold. It’s wrapped around Adam, who is in his arms, the top of his little head barely peeking out from the top of the coat and blanket he’s bundled in. Will might be exposed to the chill, but Adam is protected. Even in his obviously altered mental state, Will has ensured Adam is cared for. It makes something ache deep inside Hannibal.

Will shoulders past him into the foyer. Given the circumstances, Hannibal doesn’t object. Better that they’re inside and warm. “I had to keep him safe,” Will repeats, wide-eyed and trembling, “It was following us, and I didn’t know where else to go.”

“What was following you?” Hannibal asks, trying to ascertain what kind of mental state Will is in.

“I—” Will’s arms tighten around the boy. “Hobbs. I saw Hobbs, but...”

“You killed Garrett Hobbs,” Hannibal says, level and calm, “You watched him die.”

Will is shaking in earnest now, a continuous sort of quake he can’t seem to settle, and it makes Hannibal worry that his grip on Adam might slip. “I saw him. I saw him, and I saw Gideon, but then it was the stag, and I— It was following us, Hannibal, watching him, and I had to keep him safe.”

And, feverish and delusional, his instinctive urge to take Adam somewhere safe had brought him to Hannibal’s door.

I love you.

The thought strikes Hannibal like a bolt of lightning. He had been intrigued by Will since they met, had been charmed by Adam, had become fond of them, and gradually drawn into their orbit, into Will’s arms and Adam’s trust, but now it truly sinks in. He *loves* them, both of them, the first people he has loved since Mischa. To lose either of them would be a catastrophic loss equal to the loss of his sister. He wasn’t capable of living without them anymore, this rude, brilliant, fascinating man and his quiet little boy with ancient eyes.

“Give Adam to me, Will,” He says carefully, projecting as much calm steadiness as he can muster, “I’ll take care of him. You know he’s safe with me.”

For a moment, he thinks Will might refuse, staring wild-eyed at Hannibal with his son clutched to his chest. But then, slowly, he nods. He steps forward, holding his precious bundle out for Hannibal to take. And as he takes the boy into his own arms, pulling him to his chest, Hannibal realizes that Adam isn’t asleep. Because a single arm slips free of his

fabric cocoon to wrap around Hannibal's neck, blinking up at him with wide denim-colored eyes.

And then Will starts seizing, eyes rolling back in his head and limbs jerking uncontrollably. Adam screams, high and terrified and animal, a pure and instinctual terror at the distress and illness of the only parent he's ever known. Hannibal curses in Lithuanian, quickly shifting Adam to rest balanced, weeping softly, on his hip. Then he uses his other arm to loop around Will's waist and guide him to lie down on the couch, making sure his airways are clear and there's no risk of him injuring himself. Once he's sure Will is alright, that the seizure is passing, he brings Adam back to his chest, cradling him the way he's seen Will do.

Adam clings to him, still weeping quietly almost silently, and Hannibal is suddenly reminded strongly of Mischa, the way she had clutched at him, shivering and crying, in the days before he lost her. He hadn't been able to protect Mischa then, but he can comfort Adam now. "Shh," He murmurs, rubbing a hand up and down the boy's little back, "Shh, you're alright, *žvaigždė, mažasis,* I've got you."

And Adam whimpers, "*Papa.*"

If he didn't know it was medically impossible, Hannibal would swear his heart stopped beating for a moment. For Adam to tell others that Hannibal was his father was momentous, but to have it addressed directly to him… it feels, suddenly, as if the center of gravity in Hannibal's life has changed. As though the world no longer revolves around the sun, but instead around a fragile little body in his arms, all wild curls and huge blue eyes. Hannibal knows, in this moment, with a startling clarity and certainty, that he would sacrifice his own life to ensure Adam's safety and happiness.

"I'm here, *žvaigždė* ," He croons, holding Will's son — *His own son!* — "I'm right here, Papa's here."

Chapter End Notes

The pet names Hannibal used to comfort Adam translate to "star" (obviously), and "little one".

shatter

"What about Adam's mother?" Hannibal prompts, "If you won't tell me about your own, why not tell me about his? What was your relationship like?"

"There was no relationship," Will replies, but his cool voice is belied by something dark and intense in his eyes. "Nothing to tell. I was drunk and touch-starved and lonely. She was drunk and… horny, I guess. Enough to end up banging a weird, antisocial asshole. I barely remember any of it. Even what she looked like. Isn't that fucked up? My son's mother and all I remember is that she had green eyes."

"Were you involved at all in her pregnancy?"

"I didn't even know she was pregnant," Will's laugh is harsh and bitter, "Just woke up one morning and there was a baby in a car seat on my porch, like the fuckin' stork dropped him off."

Hannibal considers that. "And you haven't heard from her since?"

"Unless you count her name on the birth certificate as contact." Will is trying very hard to seem casual, his spine as he leans back in the chair just a little too tense to come across with the nonchalance Will obviously intends. "Adam Graham, born to Marcia Raki and William Graham."

"I assume you had a paternity test to be sure he was truly yours. It's the logical thing to do in such a situation."

Will nods. "First thought I had when I finally stopped freaking out. Came back a match, of course, and then when he got a little older, well…"

Well indeed. Having met them both, there can be no question that Adam is Will's son. The likeness is almost uncanny. Marcia Raki, whoever and wherever she may be, seems to have left no physical traces of herself in her unwanted child. That could change, of course, as Adam ages and grows, features from his mother could present themselves and become apparent in him. But for the moment, Adam's looks are entirely Will. It seems fitting, in a way, that the parent who has raised him is the only one he resembles.

In kindergarten, Adam Graham watches his classmates make cards for Mother's Day and wonders what exactly he's missing.

In first grade, Adam Graham-Lecter looks up at the babysitter telling him he's messing up his Fathers' Day card and says, "I have two daddies. I know where the apostrophe goes."

A month after Adam turns eighteen, he's just leaving the observatory after his shift when a woman approaches him. Late thirties, early forties. Dark hair. Smile lines around her mouth

and eyes. Green eyes.

“Excuse me,” She says, and Adam stops walking, because it’s polite, and because maybe she’s lost. “Are you Adam Graham?”

“Graham-Lecter,” He corrects without thinking. A moment later, he realizes that he doesn’t recognize this woman, and he doesn’t know why or how she would know his name. It makes something twist uncomfortably in his belly. “And yes, I am. Have we met?”

“And your father is William Graham?”

And his unease spikes into alarm. He doesn’t know her. How does she know him? Is he being stalked? Targeted for something? He thinks of Nigel, the way he had beat Adam’s bullies off and let Adam tend his bloody knuckles afterwards. He misses Nigel all the time, but especially right now. He’d always felt safe with Nigel, and he doesn’t feel safe now. *One day, starlight, I’m gonna teach you to throw a proper punch.* But they hadn’t had time before Nigel had to go home.

“How do you know that?”

The woman is gnawing on her lip, like she’s anxious. But her eyes keep flicking over her face, trying to catch his eye. Adam looks resolutely at a spot near her nose. “You were born on July 20th, 2008. You were five and a half pounds. I know because I’m your mother.”

Adam takes a step back automatically, putting more distance between them. As if he could shield himself from her, the words she spoke. He wants to cover his ears.

“You’re lying,” He says, and it feels like his mouth is full of sandpaper.

“I’m not,” She’s staring at him, like she’s starving and he’s her favorite food. Or like she’s trying to memorize him. “I promise I’m not. I can… here.” She pulls out her wallet, takes out a paper, folded small, and hands it to him.

It’s a copy of his birth certificate. It’s worn with age and repeated folding and unfolding, but it’s recognizable. It is, as far as Adam can tell, genuine.

He looks back up at her and she’s watching him with an intensity that makes his skin crawl. They look at each other in silence for a few moments before Adam realizes she’s waiting for him to react.

His throat feels dry. When he swallows, it sounds deafeningly loud in the silence. “How did you find me?”

“I saw a picture of you online,” She — His mother, Marcia Raki — replies. Adam had won first prize at the last science fair of his high school career. There had been a photo published on the school’s website, of him grinning next to his display of an analysis of a potential new rocket guidance system to enhance maneuverability in space flight. When he’d been hired at the local observatory, they’d put the photo on their own website. “I saw your name, and, well, you look so much like your father…”

Adam doesn't need her to tell him that. He's been having people point out his resemblance to Dad for as long as he can remember. "Why now? Why contact me when I'm eighteen and not… any time before?"

"I was afraid," says Marcia, and she looks down, finally abandoning her quest for eye-contact. "When you were born, I was twenty-two. Nowhere near ready to be a parent. I was scared shitless, and I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to be a parent, much less a single parent. I figured your dad would be better for you than me."

"He was." Adam says, and it's not meant as a barb, only as a statement of fact. Dad had been afraid, too, Adam knows, but *he* hadn't dumped Adam and ran. He'd done the best he could, and Adam had grown up safe and happy and loved. Better that than being raised by a woman who would openly tell the child she walked out on that she hadn't wanted him.

"By the time I grew up enough to get my head out of my ass and realize what a huge mistake I'd made, I… I was scared. Scared that you'd resent me, that your dad would have told you I'm the Wicked Witch of the West, that if I tried to reach out, he wouldn't let me have contact with you." Marcia's eyes are bright and shiny with unshed tears, but all Adam can think about is the look on his dad's face when Adam first asked him why all the kids he knew had a mother except for him.

"I… I need to leave."

He manages to hold himself together long enough to get home. But the moment he steps into the kitchen, sees the familiar sight of his dad leaning on the counter island to watch papa cook, he can't help himself. The unsteady breathing he'd done his best to control on the way home breaks, and his vision blurs with tears. He feels like his brain is full of static, like his skin itches and doesn't fit right.

"*Daddy*," His voice comes out high and strained, the childlike address he hasn't used in ages wavering and breaking. His fathers whirl towards the sound of his voice, and instantly both of them are hurrying towards him, their meal forgotten.

"*Mielasis?*" Papa pulls him into his arms, and Adam sags against him, letting his body be supported and enveloped by the strong surety of his father's embrace. He wishes, for a moment, that he was still small enough to be properly held, carried.

"We've got you, sweetheart," They're guiding him, he realizes, ushering him into the living room and onto the couch, where Adam leans against Papa's chest as Dad drapes himself over Adam's other side, both of them comforting him with their presence, their touch and scent and weight. It's like a weighted blanket but even better, being held between his parents. Adam takes deep, slow breaths, the way Papa had taught him years and years ago. In for four, hold for four, out for four. The familiar exercise helps him settle enough to use his words.

"She… she found me, Daddy," He gasps out, still shuddering with the force of his tears.

A gentle hand combs through his curls as Dad replies, "Who did, darlin'?"

“Ma… Marcia. My mother.”

The hand in his hair goes still. Papa’s arms tighten around him.

“Are you certain it was her?” Papa asks, quiet and careful. Adam nods, and then nods a couple more times just because the movement feels good.

“She came up to me in the parking lot. She knew my birthday and my birth weight, and she had a copy of my birth certificate.”

Slowly, the hand in Adam’s hair retracts. Dad stands up. Adam wonders if he’s going to leave the room, but he simply picks something up from the table — An empty teacup, one that must have been left there after a late night with little cleanup. It’s porcelain-white and pretty and delicate.

He flings it at the wall. It shatters with a loud crash that makes Adam jump and cover his ears, and makes Papa gasp a sharp “ *Will—* “

But whatever scolding Papa was going to give dies on his tongue, because Dad is screaming. Not screaming anything in particular, no words, but just screaming, raw and animalistic and horrible. Adam is bad at identifying tone, it’s something he’s had to practice with his papa a lot over the years, but the meaning of this awful sound comes across clearly. It sounds like years of anger and resentment and pain, all coming out at once, in one awful, heartwrenching noise.

It feels to Adam like that scream goes on forever. But eventually, it dies out, leaving Dad trembling and breathing heavy, staring at the fallen shards of what had once been his favorite teacup.

Gently, coaxingly, Papa says, “ *Mylimasis* .”

Dad turns, and the sight of Adam cuddled against Papa’s chest with his hands over his ears must wake the parent part of him back up, because he sounds like himself again when he says, “Oh Adam, baby, I’m sorry.”

Then he’s back on the couch, leaning against and holding Adam as Papa’s arms wrap around them both.

beginning

Chapter Notes

> Very short, but I'm putting out what my brain gives me, so this will have to do, I suppose

There is a baby on Will's porch. The dogs had woken him up barking, and when he stumbled to the door, he honestly thought he might still be dreaming. Because there's a baby on his porch. He can see its little face, just barely poking out from the bundle of blankets tucked into the baby carrier sitting against the porch railing. It is, as far as Will can tell, asleep. Will stares at it through the screen door, as if keeping a barrier between himself and the small intruder will make things make sense.

"I'm dreaming," He says aloud, testing the notion out, "This isn't happening." Just to be sure, he pinches himself. It stings, and nothing about the situation changes. Oh fuck.

He hushes the dogs, eases the door open slowly, and steps out onto the porch. He kneels down next to the carseat to examine his unexpected visitor. Atop the blankets is an envelope. Will picks it up, resolutely ignoring that his fingers are trembling. The envelope isn't sealed, the flap simply tucked in. He pulls it open. The first thing he pulls out is a note, handwritten, on plain notebook paper. The letters are rough, as if the writer's hand was shaking.

I can't be a mother. I hope you can do better by him than I can.

"Jesus Christ," Will breathes, shaking his head in disbelief. What kind of person would dump a baby on a porch like they live in Harry fucking Potter? Who in their right mind would think Will Graham, of all people, would know what to do with a baby?

He pulls out another paper. This one is a birth certificate, declaring that Adam Graham had been born on July 20th — *Two days ago, there is a two day old baby on his porch* — to Marcia Raki and William Graham.

He drops the envelope, pushes himself backwards, scrambling away from the carrier and its contents. *No* is the only coherent thought in his brain. *No, no, no, no, no.* That can't be right. This can't be happening. There's no way. Is there?

His back hits the screen door with a loud bang, and the baby's eyes snap open. They're still the colorless haze of the newly born, still unfocused and uncomprehending, but very much awake. And then it — *He, the certificate said Adam, it's a boy, a he* — starts to scream. "Shit!" Will hisses, and then groans because he's pretty sure you aren't supposed to swear in front of kids. Wobbling in his haste, he stands up, grabs the handle of the carseat, and takes

the baby inside. At least inside he can be sure the baby is healthy and not damaged by his overnight stay on Will's porch.

Which leads him to a new problem. Instead of on his porch, there is now a baby in his house. A baby who is two days old, and currently screaming at the top of his little lungs. The dogs, curious and agitated, swarm his legs, sniffing at the carseat in Will's grasp, and he shoos them away. Oh God, the baby is still crying. How does he make him stop crying?

"Fuck," He says, and then winces. He's really got to get the swearing thing under control, if this whole baby situation is going to be part of his life. "Okay. Don't panic." But saying the words doesn't convince him that panicking is not an entirely appropriate response. Setting the envelope aside, he stares down at the bundle of blankets that contain a now-squirming, still-screaming infant.

"Hey," He says, and then feels entirely ridiculous, because he's talking to a newborn that showed up on his porch. "Hey, what are you crying for?" Christ in heaven, what is he doing? Use your brain, Graham, he's crying because he's two days old and it's all he knows how to do!

"Hey," He says again, because apparently his brain has short-circuited, and it's all he can think to do, "Hey, baby, it's alright. You're okay." Slowly, hands still trembling, he reaches down and fumbles with the latches that hold the baby in the carrier. When they release, he lifts the child as carefully as he can manage, holding him against his chest the way he's seen people do. It feels different, actually holding this tiny, fragile little creature. It feels, suddenly, *real* . This is happening. Will tightens his grip on the baby to keep himself from shaking.

He's never tried to use his empathy on someone so young. Doesn't even know if it's possible. But he needs to know how to fix things, and he can't do that without knowing what the problem is, and little Adam doesn't have the words to tell him. He takes a deep breath, taking in the smell of hospital and milk and baby-sweetness on his little guest's skin. He lets the barriers around his mind fall and tries to let himself sink into Adam's.

It feels strange, like nothing Will has ever experienced before, on his own or through his empathy. It's confusing and frightening and overwhelming, which almost sends him into a fresh panic before he realizes that's what the whole world must feel like to a person who has just barely joined it. Hunger and cold and confusion.

Will comes back to himself with a shudder, wrapping the blankets more securely in an attempt to soothe and warm the little one who is apparently now his responsibility. The baby is hungry. Only Will can't feed him. That's a problem, but one he can put his mind to and solve.

Where can he find milk or formula or whatever? The store? But the baby is still crying, and he doesn't want to subject the shopping public to that. Where else has what he needs? A hospital? Yes, a hospital would have things to feed a newborn. And a hospital could be sure the baby wasn't harmed by spending who knows how long on his porch. Maybe get a DNA test, make sure what's written on the birth certificate is true. That this kid is Will's. Yes, a hospital would be a good place to go.

“Okay, Adam,” He says slowly, trying out the name from the birth certificate and finding that it feels natural, feels right on his tongue, “I don’t know what I’m doing, but I’m gonna figure it out, alright?”

real

Hannibal smells her before he sees her. A strong, overly-sweet smell of artificial lavender and vanilla. It's unfamiliar, not someone he knows. Not someone he invited or expected. And his husband and son always inform him when they have guests. He's received no such information. What is a stranger doing in his house?

He heads towards the foyer only to be intercepted by his son. Adam is wide-eyed, anxiety radiating out of every pore, visible in the compulsive, rhythmic taps of his fingers against his jeans. He shoves gently at Hannibal's chest until he steps back into the kitchen, which Hannibal does with an inquisitive glance down at him. "Papa," Adam says softly, and then switches to French, the one language other than English that both his parents speak, and thus the one they three tended to use to have private conversations around others. *"She's here, Papa, she followed me home."*

She. There's only one she Hannibal can think of whose presence would distress Adam so. Who would have the audacity to follow Adam home, to come into their house.

"Your mother?"

Adam nods, pulling his bottom lip between his teeth to gnaw on it anxiously. Hannibal closes his eyes, forces himself to take a deep breath and calm the instinctive desire to kill this interloper who dared try to insert herself into Adam's life after so long. Tried to lay claim to what was Hannibal's. The breath gives him a moment to suppress those brutal urges, but he can smell Adam's mother in the air.

"She followed you?"

"She stopped me in the parking lot again. I told her I didn't want to talk to her, but she said she wanted to see where I live, and talk to my father. And she followed me home. I didn't know how to make her not follow me."

The nerve of this woman, to follow Adam here after he tried to distance himself from her! It's enough to make Hannibal's hands itch with the urge to kill, to cut and slice and to serve her up on a plate for his family to eat. Marcia Raki brought his beloved and their son nothing but sorrow and pain in her life, but in her death, she could nourish them the way they deserved.

But no, he can't do that when she's been seen publicly with Adam. There could be questions, should she disappear, and he would never put his family at risk that way. Looking down at his son's worried face, Hannibal lets out a sigh and cradles Adam's cheek in his palm. *"You did the best you could by telling her you didn't want to speak to her. It's not your fault she chose to follow you, and you couldn't have kept her from doing so. I will handle her."*

"Handle her in the basement?" A hint of trepidation creeps into Adam's voice. For all that he had mostly accepted being told of Hannibal's little hobby, Hannibal supposes it's only

natural for a young boy to be dismayed by the notion of his mother's life ending, even if they have no relationship.

"*No, sweet boy*," Hannibal assures him, "*But you said she wanted to speak to your father? Well, she's going to speak with one of them.*"

Adam's mother, as it turns out, is a small, dark-haired woman. Hannibal can see faint traces of Adam in her face -- Her chin, the curve of her lips, the stubborn set of her jaw -- but mostly, Adam takes after Will to an almost uncanny degree. Hannibal finds a vindictive sort of satisfaction in that, how even as she tries to reclaim the place she forfeited in his life, it's unmistakable that Adam is *Will's* , not hers. She had been looking around the foyer while Adam and Hannibal had spoken in the kitchen, but at the sound of their footsteps, her eyes snap to them. They are wide and a dark, forest-like green. From many years in the past, Will's voice whispers in his ear: *"I barely remember any of it. Even what she looked like. Isn't that fucked up? My son's mother and all I remember is that she had green eyes."*

"Who are you?" She demands, her chin tilting up so she can meet his eyes. Rather bold of her, considering that she is in his house, where she hasn't been invited, and only located by following someone who didn't wish for her company. Hannibal thinks, wistfully, of the dishes he could make with her if only Will would allow him to hunt her. Wonders if feeding her womb to Adam would be too heavy-handed.

He makes sure to keep his tone cordial and calm as he replies, "I was told you wanted to speak to Adam's father."

Those green eyes narrow. "You aren't Will Graham. I wasn't drunk enough to not know what he looked like."

"Indeed I'm not," Hannibal pastes on a polite smile he doesn't feel, "William Graham-Lecter is my husband. You didn't specify which of his fathers you wanted to speak to."

"I figured it would be obvious," Marcia says, and the arrogance in her tone makes Hannibal's jaw clench, "I meant his *real* father."

The beast in Hannibal's chest roars an outraged challenge. Adam's hand on his arm tightens, blunt, chewed-off fingernails digging into his skin, and he's so quiet that Hannibal thinks he might be holding his breath. Hannibal grits his teeth and imagines all the ways in which he could make her suffer before she graces his table, more nurturing to her son in death than in life.

"*Maža žvaigždė*," he says, a lighthearted calm he does not feel projected in his voice, "Am I real?"

Adam looks up at him, lips parted slightly as if to ask a question, but then he seems to realize why Hannibal asks, and says slowly, "Yes, Papa."

Marcia Raki's lips tighten ever so slightly at the appellation, but she says nothing, watching them with something like suspicion.

“And am I not your father?”

“You are,” Adam nods, “You adopted me a month after you and Dad got married.”

Hannibal grins, and it feels more like a baring of teeth at a rival. “You see? I am real, and I am Adam’s father, thus you are, in fact, speaking to Adam’s real father.”

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Adam nod, something almost like protectiveness in the set of his jaw. Hannibal does not need Adam to defend him, but he’s charmed that the boy would want to.

Marcia looks rather like she’s swallowed a lemon.

“You know what I meant.”

“I do. However, Will is unfortunately not home. And I very much want to speak to you myself.” Hannibal feels Adam’s fingers drumming anxiously against his arm, and lays his own hand over the back of Adam’s, leaving his fingers free to tap, but still providing a comforting pressure. Marcia’s eyes follow the movement, and her brow furrows. Ah, *there* is another similarity. Her confused expression is very much like Adam’s.

Hannibal nods towards the living room, watches as his unwanted guest follows his direction. Marcia sits, without being offered a seat, in Hannibal’s favorite chair. He lets the rudeness roll off of him like water off a duck’s back, settling himself on the couch and not bothering to hide a small, pleased smile when Adam immediately nestles himself against Hannibal’s side. Freshly turned adult he may be, but Adam is still in need of comfort in times of stress, and that fact that he remains willing, at his age, to seek that comfort in physical affection with his fathers, is endearing. To have Adam turn to him for comfort in the presence of his biological mother satisfies something dark and possessive in him. *See?* He wants to hiss, *He doesn’t need you. He doesn’t want you. He has me.*

“I wanted to see where you live,” Marcia says to Adam, who peers in her direction but doesn’t meet her eyes. “See how you’re being taken care of.”

“Better than you cared for him,” Hannibal replies smoothly, and her little flinch makes him fight back a smirk.

“I… I wasn’t ready to care for him,” She says, “I was young and didn’t know what to do.”

“You abandoned him,” Hannibal says softly, evenly, running a hand gently along Adam’s spine when he cringes at the words, “Like Hera rejecting Hephaestus, you threw him away.”

Marcia meets his eyes, defiant. “I’m his mother. I carried him for nine months, gave birth to him.”

“And promptly dumped him on a porch in the middle of the night. Even in July, Virginia gets cold at night. And in a rural area like Wolf Trap, anything might have happened before Will woke and found him.” The thought alone makes him want to snarl, want to hold Adam tighter just to assure himself that nothing *did* happen, that his son is alive and well, no thanks

at all to Marcia Raki. The notion of anyone leaving an infant at risk like that is repulsive, even in retrospect. "He could have died because of your selfishness."

"I was overwhelmed, I was scared, I was sure my parents would disown me if they knew," She looks away from Hannibal, back to Adam, who is resolutely *not* looking at her. "Sweetheart… Adam…"

"Did you know," Hannibal says one day when Will is in the hospital, "That, generally, in places like hospitals and schools, the signal for a missing male child is called Code Adam?"

Will sighs, looking down at the small form tucked against him in the hospital bed. Will's illness and hospital stay have made Adam clingy, and the boy insists on being in physical contact with Will whenever possible. Even now, as he sleeps, Adam clutches Will's hand in both his own, as though Will might just get up and wander away if not for Adam's grip. "I know. He's named for the code."

Hannibal takes a moment to consider that information, but it doesn't make sense. "Named for it?"

Will nods, and he looks exhausted. Not just in the way that his encephalitis and its treatment have exhausted him, but a mental sort of exhaustion. A sort of bone-deep weariness that even medication and rest won't heal. An exhaustion that speaks of sorrow and loneliness.

"He couldn't leave the hospital without a name, but his mother… she didn't want anything to do with him. All she said was that his surname should be Graham. I took him to a hospital after I found him on my porch, to be sure he was okay, and it was the same one where he was born. The nurses told me that they named him Adam, like the lost child code."

"Don't say his name," Hannibal snaps, "You couldn't even be bothered to give him one. And now you think you deserve to waltz back into his life like you have any right to be in it? It's crude, not to mention cruel."

"Shouldn't a child know his parents?"

Hannibal thinks of Will, how his mother had vanished when he was a toddler, and how he steadfastly refused to acknowledge that she had ever existed, much less had an effect on him by her absence. How Adam's mother leaving him at Will's door had made him wonder what must be wrong, fundamentally, with both himself and his son for both to leave their children so young and vulnerable.

"I know my parents," It's quiet, a mumble against Hannibal's side, such that he can barely hear it. But then Adam takes a deep breath, raises his head, and repeats, "I know my parents." Hannibal's pride is a hot, devouring thing that floods his body, warming him as Adam pulls out of his embrace, straightens up, and looks at his mother. "I know my dad was scared, that he had no idea what he was doing, but he bucked up and did the best he could for

me with who he was and what he had. I know my papa could have turned around and ran when he found out my dad had me, but he didn't. He stayed and he became my papa even though he didn't have to."

Marcia Raki looks adrift, as though she had anticipated something entirely different than what she received. Had she expected Adam to welcome her with open arms, after eighteen years of nothing, simply because she had given birth to him?

"You're guilty," Hannibal realizes, taking in her anxious fidgeting, the way her eyes are drawn to Adam but keep flicking away, the way she can't seem to keep her hands still. "You reached out to him to be forgiven for your trespasses. Adam is a stain on your conscience. Tell me, Marcia," He nods towards the golden band on her left hand, "Does your spouse know about Adam?"

She flinches, covers her left hand with her right, as if to hide the ring. Then she shakes her head in the negative. "I…" She stops, clears her throat, and then continues, pleadingly, "I could be a good mother to you, if you let me try. I know I've already missed so much, and I can't undo that, but I can make it up to you. My daughters…"

"Daughters?" Adam's voice is soft, inflectionless. If Hannibal didn't know him, he would think this meant nothing to him. But he can see the way Adam's fingernails dig into his own arms, the way he goes suddenly still and then, barely perceptible, begins to rock ever so slightly. "You have daughters?"

Marcia relaxes, a little smile crossing her face. She thinks Adam is intrigued, that she has discovered a way past his defenses. "Yes. Three of them, you have three half-sisters."

"So it was me."

Hannibal bites the inside of his cheek as he realizes just what Adam -- *His darling, precious little star, who deserved better than this horrible woman!* -- would take from that revelation. Marcia, however, doesn't seem to be up to speed.

"What?"

"It was me." And Adam's voice cracks, fingernails scraping down his arms hard enough to leave thin red marks despite how they've been bitten almost to the quick. "You said you didn't want to be a mother, but you *are*, you have other kids, kids you kept." His breathing is speeding up and his rocking gains momentum as he babbles, "You kept your daughters but you didn't keep me, you didn't want me. It was me, it was something wrong with me, what was it? *What was wrong with me?*"

"Adam. Adam, look at me." Hannibal seizes Adam's face in his hands, directs the boy's tearful gaze to him rather than the woman who abandoned him. "Take deep breaths, *mielasis* . Cross your arms over your chest. Close your eyes." Shaking, Adam obeys, though his breathing is still faster than Hannibal would like. Standing, Hannibal turns to the interloper who is now staring at his son in something like horror.

"You need to leave."

“Did I--”

“I will not ask you again. Get out of my house. *Now.*”

He leaves Adam’s side just long enough to ensure that Marcia goes, watching her car leave the driveway with the grim satisfaction that, if she tries to contact Adam again, it will not be at their home. When he returns to the living room, Adam’s breathing is steady, though the force with which he rocks, and the way he hugs himself says that he’s just barely keeping himself in check. He looks up at the sound of Hannibal’s footsteps, and the tears pouring down his cheeks makes Hannibal want to tear the world apart, with his bare hands and his teeth, if only that would please his son.

“What’s wrong with me, Papa?”

“ *Nothing* .” It comes out close to a growl, fierce and sure, but Adam doesn’t startle, doesn’t flinch, and so Hannibal makes no effort to soften his tone as he crosses to kneel in front of the couch. “Nothing is wrong with you at all, *žvaigždė* . And you shouldn’t worry your wonderful mind trying to figure out why she’s such a fool. She doesn’t deserve to have you in her life, my heart, and you’re better off without her.”

Adam sniffles, leaning forward to bury his head in the crook of Hannibal’s neck like he’s a little boy again. Hannibal cradles the back of his head in his hand and privately vows that, for once, Will’s rule about approving Hannibal’s hunts might be worth ignoring.

hospital

Chapter Notes

TW for this chapter: Disturbing dream imagery, including harm to a child

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something is beeping. It's slow and steady, just loud enough to penetrate his awareness. Will wants it to stop so he can sleep. With a soft grumble, he blinks his eyes open to find himself staring not at his house but at a blank ceiling, unyielding white light and tile and the sharp smell of antiseptic. It takes a few moments to click. Chemical smell. Bright lights. Thin, scratchy blanket. Oh *fuck* , he's in a hospital. How did he get to a hospital? He scrounges around in his memory, trying to recollect what had happened. It comes back in fragments of memories and dreams, splinters of images and sounds and sensations

Snow, stained with black sludge and blood. Hobbs. Gideon. The stag. Hobbs's cabin, but where Marissa Schurr had been, his little boy hanging impaled from the antlers. The Hobbs's kitchen, Will standing where Hobbs stood. Hannibal, hands shaking, aiming a gun at Will as he drags a knife across Adam's throat.

Hannibal sprawled limp in the snow, blood pooling in the snow around his head like a grotesque halo. Antlers sprouting from the walls, enclosing Adam's sleeping form in their tines like a sharp, dangerous cage. Gideon's empty cell. Hannibal's mouth on his neck, Adam's scream. Hannibal offering him a still-beating heart in his hands, hands and mouth stained with blood. Standing in Hannibal's foyer with Adam in his arms. Adam running from him, into the jaws of a monster.

Hannibal's worried expression. *Give Adam to me, Will. I'll take care of him. You know he's safe with me*. The feathered stag standing protectively over a fawn with ink-dark down, lowering his head to charge whatever threatens his young.

Forcing his awareness out of his nightmares, Will turns his head. In a chair beside the bed sits Hannibal, with Adam in his lap. Both of them are asleep, Adam's head on Hannibal's chest, with Hannibal's chin tilted down to rest on top of Adam's head. One little hand has seized a fistful of Hannibal's shirt, holding on even in his sleep. At the sight of them, it feels like a boulder has been lifted off Will's chest. They are safe and healthy and whole. His nightmares have not yet bled through into reality. With a sigh, Will rolls onto his side, extending a hand -- the one without an IV in it -- to comb his fingers gently through Adam's curls, a small reassurance that his boy was truly there and well.

Adam stirs at the contact, something incoherent and sleepy falling from his lips as he tips his head into the touch. Slowly, his eyes blink open, and he mumbles "Daddy?" with such a wondrous delight that Will wants to cry.

“Hey, you,” Will breathes, voice raspy with disuse, trailing his fingers along the side of his son’s head until he can cup Adam’s cheek. “How’re you doin’?”

“You were asleep for a long time,” Adam says, tone implying he thinks that’s an answer to Will’s question, “You scared me.”

“I’m sorry, sweetheart,” Adam is five. A couple hours is an eternity to him. Still, Will has to ask. “How long is a long time?”

Adam’s nose crinkles, as it does when he’s thinking hard. Finally, after a moment, he says, “Three sleeps.”

Will blinks. Blinks again. Wonders what in the hell happened to have him unconscious for three days. “You’re sure?”

Adam nods, firm. “Three sleeps. I counted, ‘cause you owe me three bedtime stories.”

That is enough to coax a smile out of Will, even a small, tired one. “Oh yeah?”

His boy sighs, as if his life is so terribly difficult. “Uh-huh. Papa knows good stories, but he doesn’t do the voices.”

Will feels like if he wasn’t already laying down, he might have fallen over. To be told that Adam had claimed Hannibal as his parent to his teacher had been stunning and endearing, but to hear the word fall so casually from Adam’s own lips feels akin to witnessing a miracle. Will has spent five years worrying that he alone is not enough, that raising Adam by himself, as it seemed he must, would somehow damage his precious son. Now, by some lucky twist of fate, it seems he may not have to.

“Well,” He says, swallowing the sudden lump in his throat, “He hasn’t been telling stories long. You’ll have to teach him how.”

Adam releases his grip on Hannibal’s shirt, reaches forward and climbs over the small gap between Hannibal’s legs and the hospital bed Will lays in. The movement jostles Hannibal into waking, neck straightening and eyes opening just as Adam tucks himself under Will’s arm. “Will,” He murmurs, and the gruff thickness of his accent when he’s just woken is familiar enough now to be comforting. His hand, when he runs it gently through Will’s hair, is even more comforting. The relief in his eyes, the way Adam clings to his papery hospital gown, drives home that, even if Will doesn’t know what it was, something bad happened to him.

“Hi,” He tilts his head against Hannibal’s hand, chasing his touch, vaguely recognizing that he had soothed Adam with the same gesture before Hannibal woke. “What…”

“You had encephalitis, an inflammation in your brain that made you very ill,” Hannibal’s voice is soft, reassuring, even as the words set off alarm bells in Will’s head, “That’s why you’ve been having headaches and losing time. They should stop over time, now that you’re being treated.”

Will looks down at his son, curled into the fetal position in the small space between the edge of the bed and Will's body. "How did I get here?"

"You were having a delusional episode, hallucinating. You were convinced that Garret Jacob Hobbs was following you, and Adam wasn't safe at your home, so you brought him to mine." Will thinks he might remember that, a little. Shivering as he wrapped Adam in a blanket and Will's own coat. The desperate, instinctive urge to run, flee, protect his child. The vague notion that Hannibal could help, Hannibal would know what to do, Hannibal would protect Adam. *Give Adam to me, Will.*

Adam pipes up then, his voice muffled from his face being pressed to Will's chest. "You started shaking, Daddy. Papa called it a see-zurr."

"Seizure," Hannibal corrects gently, apparently unphased by the new title he's been granted, "A mild one, but added to your other symptoms, I brought you here, where the doctors discovered the encephalitis."

An inflammation of the brain. Will closes his eyes, focuses on the sensations of his son at his side and Hannibal's hand in his hair. Takes a deep breath. "But I'm better now?"

"You will be." Hannibal's tone is gentle, sure. Slowly, his hand descends from Will's hair to cradle his face, thumb rubbing gently against his jaw. "You're still recovering, and it will take time, even after you're released. But I will look after you… Both of you."

Will has not been looked after in a very, very long time. The notion unsettles him, makes him feel off-balance. "You don't need to do that."

"I know." And Hannibal leans forward to press a kiss against Will's forehead. Beneath the arch of his reaching torso, Adam giggles. "But I want to."

Chapter End Notes

Not entirely satisfied with this one, and I feel like it's disappointingly short but it's all my brain would give me. I'll do better.

aftermath

Daddy says they're going to see Hamble. He'd made Adam sit in the car while he went into the store to talk to someone, but when he'd come back out, he was shaky and anxious and said they had to get to Hamble. Adam likes seeing Hamble, but something about how Daddy is acting makes him nervous.

"Daddy? Is Hamble okay?"

"Hamble's fine," Daddy says, but he doesn't look back at Adam and his voice sounds tight, like there's something pressing on his throat. When they get to Hamble's office, Daddy scoops Adam out of his booster seat and jogs into the building. They pass lots of people, lots of talking and noise and movement, but Adam doesn't pay any attention to them. They're going to see Hamble. Finally, they go through one last door, and Hamble is there. So is Uncle Jack, and Auntie Bev, and Uncle Jimmy and Uncle Brian. They're all huddled around something laying on the floor, something Adam can't see. But he doesn't particularly care what they're doing.

In the middle of the room is Hamble, sitting at a big desk. He looks different than he usually does. His suit is rumpled and his hair is falling in his eyes and he looks sad and tired. And then Adam gets a good look at his face, and he suddenly feels very, very cold. Because Hamble is *hurt* .

Why is Hamble hurt? Who would dare to hurt him? Why is he just sitting there with nobody fixing his hurts? Adam hears, as if from far away, a faint whining sound, like the dogs make when they're injured. Daddy stops moving, and everyone in the room is looking at him, even Hamble, and it takes Adam a moment to realize that it's because that whine is coming from him.

"Hamble?" He whimpers, and he needs to get to Hamble, he needs to check on him, and he needs to do it *now* ; why is Daddy not letting him go to Hamble? Frustrated, he wiggles in Daddy's arms, until he finally seems to get the idea and puts him down. Adam isn't supposed to run inside, but he runs across the room, to where Hamble is standing, half out of his chair by the time Adam reaches him. But when Adam flings his arms around his middle, Hamble sits back down, like he's surprised.

"Adam." His voice is soft, hesitant, like he can't quite believe it. Adam climbs into his lap, his hands rumpling Hamble's suit further, but since Hamble doesn't say anything, Adam decides it must be okay. Hamble's arms wind around him, slow, as if he's not sure he's allowed. Adam reaches up and places his hands on either side of Hamble's face, to keep his face still enough to get a good look. There's a scratch across the bridge of Hamble's nose, and blood drying down his chin from the corner of his mouth. It makes Adam feel all twisted-up and squirmy inside, seeing Hamble bleed. He doesn't like it. It reminds him of the few times he's seen Daddy injured, and how sick and awful that had made him feel. This feels the same, that horrible worry and fear. Hamble is a grownup, and nobody should be able to hurt him.

“Hamble, you’re hurt,” he says, and, impulsively, he rubs his thumb along the sharp line of Hamble’s cheek, the way Daddy does to Adam when Adam needs comforting.

“I will survive, sweet boy,” Hamble replies, but his exhale is shaky, and his eyes are wet as he tightens one arm around Adam’s waist and his other hand lifts to rest on top of Adam’s hand. He realizes, when Hamble moves his arm, that his arm is bloody, too. Then he looks up and says, “I was worried you were dead.” Adam twists to look over his own shoulder and spots Daddy just behind him, watching them with something soft and gentle in his eyes. For a moment, the world is just the three of them, a little bubble of warmth and relief.

“Tobias Budge,” says Uncle Jack, shattering their safe little bubble, “Killed two Baltimore police officers, nearly killed an FBI Special Agent,” -- And Hamble’s arm tightens around Adam at those words, holding him tight against the solid warmth of his chest, as if to protect him -- “And after all of that, his first stop is here, at your office.”

Hamble takes a deep, shaky breath. Adam drops his hands from Hamble’s face to wrap his arms around his neck. He seems like he needs comforting. Hamble rests his free hand on Adam’s back, and then says, “He came to kill my patient.”

Uncle Jack turns his head, looking back at whatever the others are standing around, and Daddy asks, “Your patient, is that who Budge was serenading?”

“I don’t know,” replies Hamble, and Adam lays his head on Hamble’s shoulder, wanting to tell them all to be quiet. Hamble said he didn’t know, so why can’t they just leave him be? Adam still has to make sure he isn’t hurt bad, and they’re all asking questions and making it hard. “Franklyn knew more than he was telling me. He told Mr. Budge that he didn’t have to kill anymore. And then he broke Franklyn’s neck, and then he attacked me.”

Adam can’t help but whimper at the words, the idea of someone hurting Hamble, and he nuzzles his face into Hamble’s neck to remind himself that Hamble is okay, he’s safe and in one piece.

“He shouldn’t be in here,” Uncle Jack says, and Adam and Hamble’s grips on each other tighten at the exact same moment.

“You try taking him away from Hannibal right now,” Daddy offers, “Don’t blame me if he bites you.” Uncle Jack sighs, and Adam relaxes, knowing he won’t try.

“You killed him?” He asks instead, and Hamble’s chin bumps lightly against the top of Adam’s head as he nods.

“Could Franklyn have been involved in whatever Budge was doing?” Daddy prompts. Adam remembers a Franklyn, a short, round man he met the night they went to the opera with Hamble. He had talked a lot, and tried to pat Adam’s head. Adam hadn’t liked him, but he’d disliked Franklyn’s friend even more. Tall and dark, the man hadn’t smiled at all, even when Franklyn smiled too much, and his eyes had been dark and cold, and Adam had felt, looking into them, like there was nothing at all behind them. He shivers at the memory.

“I thought it was a simple matter of poor choice in friends.”

“This doesn’t feel simple to me.” Uncle Jack’s voice is heavy, but as Adam turns his head, he walks away.

Daddy moves closer, perching on the edge of the desk. He and Hamble take a deep breath and sigh, in unison. Then Daddy pulls out a cotton ball from a first aid kit on the desk and gently dabs at the blood beside Hamble’s mouth. As he leans forward, he rests his hand atop Hamble’s, the one on Adam’s back. Adam hums softly, their combined warmth and pressure soothing. Daddy’s voice is low, rough. “I feel like I’ve… dragged you into my world.”

Hamble clicks his tongue. “I got here on my own. But I appreciate the company.”

Daddy smiles. And then he learns forward farther, until his lips touch Hamble’s. Adam feels more than sees Hamble’s gasp in response, but he then he melts, his arms both leaving Adam to loop around Daddy’s neck, the same way Adam’s are around Hamble’s. Tucked snugly between their bodies, Adam soaks in the warmth of them, the satisfaction he can almost *feel* pouring from them both, the affection that once again wraps around their little trio like a protective blanket.

“Gentlemen!” Uncle Jack’s voice cuts through their peace like the crack of a whip, and Adam is sorely tempted to make good on Daddy’s warning and bite him for interrupting. “Now is not the time or place.”

Slowly, Daddy pulls back, his head ducked down like he’s embarrassed, and Hamble presses his face to Adam’s hair, so that Adam is the only one who can tell he’s smiling.

geminos

Chapter Notes

> TW for this chapter: Mentions of Margot's canonical abuse at Mason's hands, mentions of Mason possibly being a pedophile, Mason implying creepy intentions towards Adam. Really, just a TW for Mason in general.

The saga of the Verger baby begins when Margot Verger turns from Hannibal's office window, looks up at the mezzanine library, and says, "Is that a child?"

For a moment, Hannibal considers trying to convince her that there's nothing up there. After all, having a third person in his office during a session is technically a breach of confidentiality and ethics. But Margot is clever and vulnerable and has no one she would tell. So instead Hannibal says, "Yes," and follows Margot's gaze to look at the child in question, watching them from his corner hidden in the shadows of the mezzanine. "Rest assured, he is wearing headphones and can't hear anything being said. Your safety and confidentiality are intact."

He expects Margot to disregard the boy and continue on with their conversation. Instead, she tilts her head, contemplative, and asks, "Can I meet him?"

Strictly speaking, he should not allow it. Adam being in the room at all is a violation of the rules. Adam has been taught that, on the rare occasions it's necessary for him to come to Hannibal's office, he's to keep quiet, not draw attention to himself, and never, ever speak to Hannibal's patients. And Adam is such a good, sweet boy, he never makes a peep after Hannibal instructs him to be quiet. Staring up at his son, Hannibal catches his eye and gives him the signal that he can remove his headphones. Adam does so, watching him with a befuddled expression but obediently not making a noise.

"Adam," he says coaxingly, "This is Margot. She wants to meet you. Would you like to say hello?"

Cautiously, Adam scoots closer to the railing. Huge blue eyes peer down at them between the slats, wary but curious. He puts Hannibal in mind of a baby bird in a nest, looking down at the world. For a moment, they stare at each other, the tormented heiress and the little boy. "Hello, Margot."

It's a hesitant greeting, and he glances at Hannibal as soon as it leaves his lips, as though checking that he isn't in trouble for breaking a rule, even if Hannibal had said he could. Hannibal nods to reassure him, pleased by Adam's quiet bravery in speaking to a stranger despite his discomfort just because Hannibal asked it of him.

Margot's answering smile is gentle — As someone constantly abused by those meant to protect her, she shows a natural inclination to help those she sees as being even weaker, more vulnerable, than herself. And there is nothing in the world quite so uniquely vulnerable as a child. "Hello, Adam."

"He's a sweet boy," she says later as Hannibal is walking her out, "Is he yours?"

And, really, he isn't supposed to talk about his own life and family to patients, but since Margot has already seen Adam, it's a fair question. Hannibal nods, allowing himself a small smile. "He is. He can be a handful when he decides to be, but he's a good child nonetheless." Above most of humanity, he may believe himself, but it seems even he is not above the parental urge to brag about one's child. "Children are the future, are they not?"

Mason Verger is prowling Hannibal's office. In the short time that Will had officially been his patient, Hannibal had indulged Will doing the same, pleased that Will had felt comfortable enough with him to roam, to familiarize himself with Hannibal's belongings. From a man as repugnant as Mason, it comes across rude and presumptive.

"Why, Doctor, how charming." From his desk, Mason lifts the clay mug Adam had made for him in kindergarten. Slightly lumpy from being shaped by inexpert little hands, the word "*HAMBLE*" scrawled across it in a childish handwriting, it is inelegant and clumsy and infinitely precious. To have Mason put his hands on it feels like a defilement of something sacred. "I didn't know you had a little one in your life."

"I'm not in the habit of discussing my personal life with patients," Hannibal answers coolly. Mason, unfortunately, doesn't take the hint, and continues to manhandle his mug, turning it over in his hands, running his fingers over the bumps and unevenness. Hannibal is sure he will have to wash it later, if only to cleanse it of the memory.

"I love kiddies," Mason proclaims, "Just adore 'em. They're so sweet and innocent, it just really warms my heart."

Margot has told Hannibal all about her suspicions as to just exactly how much her brother loves children. Hannibal, unable to help it, thinks of Mischa, thinks of Adam. He bites his tongue, wishing it was Mason's throat, and forces his expression to remain one of polite, professional interest.

And then Mason's grasping, greedy hands falter, and Hannibal's mug — Adam's mug — falls to the ground and *shatters*.

"Oops!" He giggles, high and manic and unaware of the damage he's done or who precisely he has done it too. "How clumsy of me. Just send me the bill! Whatever it costs to replace, I can pay you back."

This mug cannot simply be replaced, of course, but Mason must know that. He had commented himself on the childish construction of it. "My son made that for me." Hannibal says, hiding his rage behind a veneer of ice.

“Oh,” replies the pig, “Never imagined you with a son, you don’t seem the type. Well, you can just get the tyke to make you another one.”

Once Mason leaves, Hannibal kneels on the floor and tries hopelessly to piece the broken shards of clay back together. He knows it won’t work, but, somehow, he would not forgive himself if he didn’t even try.

When Margot arrives for her appointment the week after meeting Adam, she looks up towards the mezzanine as soon as she walks in. Hannibal smiles despite himself as he informs her, “Adam isn’t here today. He’s at home with my partner.”

Margot nods, sits down, and announces, “I tried to seduce one of your patients. Will Graham.”

Hannibal stares, for once stunned into silence. Some of the shock must break through his mask, because Margot elegantly arches her brows and asks, with a sardonic twist to her voice that reminds him of Will, “How does that make you feel?”

“Curious,” he replies after taking a moment to steady himself and quell the foolish, irrational jealousy that stirs in his belly. “Will Graham is not a lesbian.”

“A lesbian wouldn’t be able to give me what I need.” Margot’s eyes flick again towards the mezzanine, and realization dawns.

“You attempted to seduce Will with the intention of getting pregnant.”

“With a Verger heir,” Margot shrugs, “I would be safe to rid myself of Mason.”

Clever girl, Hannibal thinks, oddly proud of her cunning despite his disapproval that she would encroach on his territory, even unknowingly. “He turned you down.”

“Said he didn’t have the right parts for my proclivities and told me he’s taken. I wouldn’t have chosen him if I had known that.”

Hannibal nods seriously. “As his partner, I appreciate the consideration.”

The way Margot’s face goes paper-white in seconds is dreadfully amusing.

“I… I didn’t know…”

“Of course you didn’t know. Not many of my patients know much about my private life.”

Margot relaxes with a thoughtful hum. “Is that out of professionalism or something else?”

“For reasons of professionalism, yes, and to protect my family as well. An unhinged friend of a former patient once attacked me and attempted to harm Will.” The memory of that day is still crystal-clear, carefully preserved in his memory palace. The moment Will had walked through the door, Adam on his hip, and all Hannibal’s fear had melted like snow. Adam’s little hands on his face, the innocent concern of a child. Will’s lips on his, the first time,

warm and soft and tasting like relief that they were both safe. "I would like to prevent a repeat of that incident if at all possible."

"So you keep your family secret, to keep them safe from the unstable minds you work with, and the ones attached to those you work with."

"Indeed." Hannibal thinks of the shards of his mug, now kept safely in a little wooden box in the drawer of his desk, and wonders if Margot might be persuaded to let him witness her brother's demise.

Adam isn't supposed to answer the door by himself. Even if he hears somebody knock or ring, he's supposed to wait for Papa or Daddy to check and then open the door. But the thing is, Daddy's still at work, and Papa is cooking and doesn't seem to have heard the doorbell. And Adam is curious. So he scurries to the kitchen, grabs his stool from its spot beside the armchair in the corner, and pulls it to the door. Then he climbs atop it and peeps through the peephole. And he gasps, clambering down from his stool and pushing it aside so he can open the door.

On the front step is a stuffed pig. It's pink and fuzzy-looking, and the biggest stuffed animal Adam has ever seen. He grabs it by the neck and hauls it into the house. It's very soft, and Adam spends a moment just running his hands over it, enjoying the fuzz against his skin. Then he strokes the pretty black ribbon around its neck and looks at the card that hangs from it.

FOR MR. ADAM GRAHAM.

That's his name! That's him! Adam giggles, delighted, and rubs a soft plush ear between his fingers. He turns the card over, thinking that it will tell him who this beautiful gift is from, but there's no name on the other side. Only a picture, a pig standing on its back legs, with a crown over its head, and surrounded by swirly, leafy little things. Under the picture is a word, one Adam doesn't recognize. *V - E - R - G - E -R.*

"Adam." And he jumps at the unexpected noise. He's never heard Papa sound like that, voice cold and hard and sharp, sounding like the feeling Adam gets when he looks at the knives Papa uses to cook, and the light bounces off the metal. He looks over his shoulder, and Papa is standing in the doorway between the hall and kitchen, watching him. "Come here."

"It's got my name on it, Papa, look."

"I asked you to come here, Adam. Do not make me ask again."

Adam's fingers dig into the soft plush of the pig. "But Papa…"

"Now."

So Adam goes, leaving the pig in front of the door and crossing to reach Papa, who lays his hand on Adam's shoulder for a moment, before going to the door and kneeling down in front

of the pig. Adam thinks that this is extremely unfair, considering that Papa had just made him leave the pig alone. And it has his name on it, so it's *Adam's* pig, not Papa's! If Papa wants a pig, he should get his own.

Papa looks at the tag, frowns, and then stands back up. Without saying anything, he picks Adam up and carries him towards the stairs. "Papa, my pig," he protests, reaching over Papa's shoulder even though he can't reach.

"Never you mind that, my darling," Papa says, one hand on the back of Adam's head, but his voice is still cold.

"But it's for me, it's got my name on it."

Papa's hand tightens against his hair, like a warning, as he climbs the stairs. "Adam, if you continue to argue with me, I am going to be very cross with you. Do you want me to be cross?"

Adam shakes his head as Papa deposits him on his bed, reaching over to grab Adam's favorite stuffie -- Aries, the lamb Papa bought him when Daddy was in the hospital -- and handing it to him. Mollified, Adam hugs the toy to his chest.

"Now," says Papa, and his voice is softer now, his hand cupping Adam's face, thumb rubbing his cheek, "See, that's better. Hmm?"

Adam pouts, even though pouting is bad, because he's kind of mad right now, and maybe Papa might deserve Adam being bad. "We could have played farm with a lamb and a pig."

"I'll get you another pig, if you want one." And Adam knows he would, but part of him is still upset that such a soft, pretty present is apparently unacceptable.

"What was the matter with *that* pig? Someone brought it here special, just for me."

Papa sighs, and it satisfies Adam, in a quiet, secret way, to learn that even his Papa can get upset. "You didn't want that pig, *mažasis* ."

"I did so!" Adam squawks, indignant that Papa would assume how he feels, that he would claim Adam didn't want his gift, even though it was one of the softest, prettiest things Adam has ever put his hands on.

"Do *not* raise your voice at me, Adam," and a hint of that knife-like cold sharpness is back, just enough to make Adam drop his gaze and run his fingers soothingly over Aries's fur. "That toy was not a gift. Gifts are meant to show affection to the person who receives it, and that downstairs wasn't meant to show affection for you."

Adam bites his lip and scoots a little closer, his leg pressing against Papa's. "Then what was it for?"

"It was a message. From someone who doesn't like me very much, to show me that he knows where we live, and he knows about you, even your name. He wants to scare me."

What a ridiculous idea. As if anybody could ever scare his Papa, who is the bravest man in the whole, entire world. “But you aren’t scared of anything.”

“I was scared today,” Papa replies, voice tight, like there’s a lump in his throat, and his eyes are bright. “When I saw you with that pig, and I realized what the message was, I was very scared.”

“Oh.” So Adam had scared his papa, without meaning to. That makes an awful, sinking guilt settle in his belly, like he’s swallowed a bowling ball. Putting his lamb aside, he crawls into his Papa’s lap and leans up to press a kiss to his cheek.

“ *Aš tave myliu, Papa* ,” He says, pronouncing the few words he’s learned of his Papa’s native tongue carefully, to be sure he gets them right.

Papa chuckles as he hugs Adam tight, pressing kisses all over his face. “ *Aš taip pat myliu tave, mano žvaigždė* .”

When Will gets home from work that night, Hannibal shows him the card with their son’s full name on one side and the Verger family crest on the other. The next morning, news breaks of meat-packing mogul Mason Verger’s horrible fall into his own pigpen.

gorgeous

For once, Adam isn't the kid everyone at school is talking about.

That dubious honor belongs to someone else this year. Apparently, there's two new kids, a boy and a girl. A pair of foreign exchange students, which makes them automatically exotic and, apparently, desirable, if the whispers he's heard are reliable. They're from somewhere in eastern Europe, apparently, but Adam hasn't heard exactly where. The both of them are staying with the Countryman family, and if the rumors are true, there's already been drama.

According to Luke, who is the biggest gossip in the school, and somehow knows everything, the two exchange kids had been dating, back wherever they came from. But shortly after they'd gotten to Maryland, the girl had dumped the boy to date Charlie, their host family's son. Adam has never liked Charlie Countryman, always seeing him as too loud, too impulsive, and vaguely fish-like in appearance. But, he supposed, there's no accounting for taste. If the rumor mill is reliable, Exchange Boy had threatened to kill Charlie when he found out.

Adam doesn't really care much if any of it is true or not. As long as the gossip stays pointed away from him, people can say whatever they want. Still, he keeps an eye out. He's heard that Exchange Boy is dangerous, and he would like to steer clear of that if at all possible.

The first time Adam encounters Exchange Boy, it's a happenstance run-in. Literally. He's just closing his locker, about to head to class, when something heavy and solid hits him hard from behind. Adam stumbles and almost falls, but a pair of strong hands grab tight and keep him vertical. He's just about to yank himself away when one of those hands moves to seize his wrist and a thickly-accented voice rasps in his ear, "Run."

So he runs, pulled along by the strong hand wrapped around his wrist, barreling through the halls so fast Adam can barely register where they are. Finally, they screech to a halt, only for Adam to yelp in fright as he's yanked to the side, into a janitor's closet. He finds himself blinking in the dim light, pressed chest-to-chest in the tight space with a boy he's never seen before. Sharp cheekbones and a strong jaw and straw-colored hair, looking down at him with wide eyes the exact shade of chocolate.

Adam counts three Mississipis before Exchange Boy —- Because this must be him, when Adam has met everyone else at this school and has never seen this one's face —- purrs, "Hello, gorgeous."

Adam blinks up at him, more eye-contact than he's made with anyone but his fathers in ages, and idly notes that no one has ever called him *gorgeous* before. "My name is Adam." He says, because that's all he can seem to think of at the moment.

"And you're gorgeous," Exchange Boy repeats with a sly grin that makes Adam's insides twist. He tucks a curl that had fallen into Adam's eyes in their run behind his ear, and Adam

shivers at the unexpected, uninvited touch. He pulls back, feels his legs bump against a plastic bucket, and wobbles, having to grasp at Exchange Boy's arms to keep upright.

"Don't touch me," He says once he's regained his balance, pulling his hands away. "I… I don't like being touched by people I don't know."

"Okay, gorgeous—"

"*Adam*."

That little smile again, playful and knowing, like Exchange Boy is privy to a secret Adam doesn't know. "Okay, Adam. I'll remember that."

"You don't need to," Adam snaps, irritated, "I don't plan on being around you any more than I have to."

Exchange Boy purses his lips, like he's hurt. "Why not, dar-- Adam?"

Adam could list any number of reasons. He's a stranger. He's a delinquent, if the rumors are true. He touched Adam without permission. He's possibly violent, possibly dangerous. He has beautiful eyes and a smile that makes Adam want to make him smile all the time.

Instead, he blurts out, "You smell."

That smile vanishes, a bark of stunned laughter in its wake. "What?"

"You smell like cigarettes. It makes my head hurt."

And with that, Adam finally reaches for the doorknob and pushes, sending them both tumbling out onto the ground. For a moment, they just lay there, side by side, staring at each other as they pant, wind knocked out of them by their collision with the floor.

Then Mr. Keyes's voice rings down the hall. "*Nigel Banyai!*"

Exchange Boy -- Nigel -- meets Adam's eyes and whispers, "*Fuck*."

revelations

"Do your worst," Will whispers as Hannibal cups his cheek. It hurts, the thought of abandoning his little boy like this. Hurts, how much he loves the man about to orphan his son. Enough to walk willingly to his own death for that love. "Just… just take care of my baby for me. Please."

Content that he has at least pled Adam's case, done all he could do, he closes his eyes and braces himself for the pain. Not a gun, Hannibal would never be so pedestrian and impersonal as that. He would want it to be close, messy. A knife, maybe, or even his bare hands. Intimate.

And then Hannibal kisses him. It takes him by surprise and he gasps against Hannibal's mouth, the familiar feel and taste of him overwhelming after so long since they last kissed. It's gentle and reverent, and Will is *flooded* with desire, just as intense and demanding as the last time. Maybe even more. Those hands have killed and maimed, that mouth has consumed human flesh, could tear Will's throat out if Hannibal so chose. But for Will, and Will alone, the monster will roll over and show his soft underbelly. It's intoxicating.

"Did you truly think that I would harm you?" Hannibal murmurs, and his voice is so sincere, so tender, that Will feels as though these weeks apart have hollowed him out, and only Hannibal's voice, his touch, could possibly fill that emptiness and make him whole again. "That I ever could? It would be as if I tore out my own heart."

It strikes him, then, that he had seen Hannibal as being the one with all the power in this situation. Hannibal was strong, experienced in killing, as at ease with violence as he was with breathing. Will had seen himself as prey, caught in the crossroads of his knowledge of right and wrong and his love for Hannibal. He was vulnerable, Hannibal could hurt him. It hadn't occurred to him that Hannibal was also vulnerable. That he could hurt Hannibal. This, here, was Hannibal's weak spot, and Will suddenly sees it clearly: *Hannibal loves him too much to kill him.*

Still held tight against Hannibal's body, Will lets himself relax, leaning against him with a sigh. Hannibal's hand moves to cradle the back of Will's head, and he presses his face to Will's hair. He feels surrounded. Adored. Cherished. Hannibal's lips trail from the top of Will's head down his temple, his cheek, to hover just against his ear. His breath is warm.

"The choice is yours, beloved. A word from you and I will be out of your life forever, should you wish it."

Will imagines that. A life without Hannibal. A less complicated life, surely, than working for the FBI as you date a serial killer, but a life in which that hollowness in his soul would be forever empty and aching.

"What will you do, if I say no?" Would he have to run? Uproot Adam from all he knows and flee for their lives? Raise his son to look always over his shoulder, in fear of the man he had once called his papa?

“I would call Uncle Jack myself,” And the words have Will’s breath catching in his throat at the implications, the weight of them. “I would tell him everything, surrender. I would be no threat to you or to Adam. But you would always know where you could find me, should you want to.”

“And if I don’t want that? If I want something else?”

Hannibal’s hand tightens in his hair, a reflexive instinct. A clutch for balance. His voice is throaty when he says, “I would be yours entirely. As I am, all of me. There is no Jekyll and Hyde here to separate out like oil and water. There’s only me, man and monster both. And I would belong to you, Will. Your devoted slave.”

Will pulls back, not disengaging, but only wishing to see Hannibal’s face. His dark eyes are wide and sincere; Will can see nothing reflected there but honestly, vulnerability. A love so intense that he is desperate with it. Will raises his hand, runs his thumb gingerly along Hannibal’s lower lip. He isn’t bitten, hadn’t thought for a moment that he might be, unless he requested it. Thoughtfully, he muses, “My beast on a leash.”

He’d expected Hannibal to balk, to reject so demeaning a comparison, but instead he nods, almost frantic in his earnestness. “Yes,” He breathes, “Yes, Will. Anything you want me to be. Yours, only yours.”

“What if I want you to fuck me, right here in your kitchen?”

The hoarse, awed noise Hannibal makes as he lifts Will onto the counter island is enough to make Will laugh and kiss him again.

first impressions

Hannibal Lecter learns about the existence of Adam Graham because Will Graham is incredibly angry. He's just approaching Agent Crawford's office, to double-check that the agent does in fact want him to accompany the team to Minnesota when he realizes Will's voice is floating through the door and into the hallway, raised and harsh with righteous outrage.

"—Sota, are you fucking kidding me? Minnesota? I can't drop everything and fly to Minnesota just because you snapped your fingers at me, Jack!"

"Will, as a part of this team—"

"I agreed to *consult*, not to traipse all over the country with zero notice."

Crawford's voice sounds strained. The bloodhound he's coveted so long is already gnawing at the leash. "I'm sure arrangements could be made."

"This isn't just texting my neighbor to give my dogs water," Will spits, and Hannibal can't see him, but he imagines that indignant fury must look beautiful on him, "I have a priority, and unlike you, my priority is not this job. It's *my son.*"

Hannibal pauses, considering. He hadn't thought that Will would be the sort of person to have a family. There was no ring on his hand, nothing in his manner to imply any sort of partnership. And yet he has a son. One whom he has primary, if not sole custody of, and one he is intensely protective of, if his willingness to snap at Jack Crawford is any indication. He has assumed Will would be entirely isolated from social bonds, being as unique and other as he was.

But a child changed things. Bringing out the natural paternal urges to provide and protect could certainly be a fine trigger for unearthing the more primal, darker desires he could sense in Will. And a child of Will's genetics, with the possibility of inheriting Will's uncanny empathy, but not yet having the capacity to build up the protective mental barriers Will had… the development of such a child could be interesting to observe.

Hannibal Lecter meets Adam Graham because Will Graham is late for a session. Hannibal has a strict policy on cancellations, and since Will had neither called nor emailed in advance of not showing up, he decides to investigate the situation.

When he enters Will's classroom, the lights are dim. Will is sitting at his desk. He's gazing in Hannibal's direction, but he doesn't so much as blink when Hannibal moves. His eyes are glassy and unfocused. Present and yet not. Beside the desk, leaning against it, sits a child. A boy, roughly four or five. This must be the son.

Hannibal has heard about Will's son, bits and pieces from Jack and from Will himself, but never much. Will, it seems, is deeply protective of the boy and his privacy, for obvious

reasons.

The child, Adam, watches Hannibal approach with wide, serious eyes the precise mirror of Will's. But he says nothing, even when Hannibal smiles politely and says, "Hello there."

Will doesn't react at all to his voice. Adam only stares, clutching a stuffed toy that seems to be a small green creature with huge eyes and large, pointy ears.

"What are you doing here?" Hannibal asks, bemused by the solemn air of the boy in front of him, "You seem a tad on the young side for the FBI Academy."

Still, Adam says nothing, only gazes up at him with those ocean eyes he shares with his father. Deciding that the child is obviously not going to interact with him, Hannibal returns his attention to the man. "Will?" He places a hand on Will's shoulder and gently shakes, "Will, can you hear me?"

Will shudders, blinking awareness back into his eyes and looking up at Hannibal with a sort of hazy confusion. "Hannibal?"

He allows himself a small smile, pleased by Will's return to the present and by the seemingly-unthinking use of his given name. "Normally, Will, I have a policy of giving notice for cancellations in advance."

Will groans, dragging a hand across his face. "Oh God. I'm sorry. Just… lost time, I guess."

There's the soft sound of shoes on carpet, and Adam appears at Will's elbow, studying Hannibal with pursed lips and narrowed eyes.

"You are forgiven," Hannibal replies, "As it gave me an excuse to get out of the office. And I made the acquaintance of this little fellow, though he doesn't seem very talkative."

"Oh," And Will's mouth twists into a wry smile, the kind Hannibal can remember his mother wearing when Mischa or his own child-self had done something she found endearing. "Yeah, that's… He's not supposed to talk to strangers, and he takes things very literally." He reaches out, loops an arm around his son, and lifts him into his lap. Immediately, the boy burrows into his father's hold, tucking his face into the crook of Will's neck to hide from Hannibal.

"Hannibal, this is my son, Adam. Adam, this is my friend, Hannibal. Say hello."

Adam turns his head, to peer up at him from Will's shoulder, shy but obedient, as he mumbles, "'lo, Hamble."

m is for

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adam loves looking at his papa's drawings. They're so pretty that sometimes it makes Adam's hands itch with the urge to make something that pretty, the way his papa does. No matter how many times Papa lets Adam watch him draw, it still always seems like magic how the blank paper and simple pencil turn into a whole picture as Papa just moves his hand. Papa always says that when Adam gets a little older, he can teach Adam to draw like that too, but Adam is content to just see it happen. Papa's pictures are always so detailed, so beautiful, that Adam sometimes feels like he could reach his hand into them and touch the things Papa has drawn, the smoothness of stone or the coolness of a river, or the warmth of fur or skin.

Adam has never looked in Papa's sketchbook without Papa there, but he's never been told it *wasn't allowed*, so when Adam spies one of them lying on the end-table beside Papa's favorite chair, he figures that leaving it out is as good as an invitation. So he climbs up into Papa's chair, which is big and comfy and smells like Papa, which makes it a great chair, and pulls the sketchbook into his lap.

The leather feels good on his fingers, and Adam spends a minute just running his fingers over the cover, enjoying the sensation that sends warm little shivers all over him. Then he opens the book, and the thick, heavy drawing paper is almost as good, so he has to stop and appreciate that, too. Finally, he focuses on the drawings. Most of them are of things Adam has seen drawings of before — Daddy, Abby, Adam himself. Even a few of Uncle Jack, and Auntie Alana, and other people Adam doesn't know who must be the people Papa talks to at work. Old buildings and paintings that Adam has never seen but Papa swears he'll show Adam someday.

Then he pauses, his fingers lingering and tracing the lines of an image he's never before encountered in Papa's drawings.

In this picture, a little girl around Adam's age stands in a field of flowers. She's smiling, her face tipped up towards the sun. The drawing is pencil, so there's no colors, but her eyes are dark and her long, curly hair is light. There's something familiar about her face. Like he's seen her before, in a dream or something. In the corner of the page, there is a word. Adam runs his finger under the letters, sounding it out: *M - I - S - C - H - A*.

"What are you looking at, *mielasis?*"

Adam looks up as his papa approaches, a fond smile on his face. In response, Adam holds out the book, pointing to the drawing of the little girl.

Papa's smile fades away and he goes very, very still.

"She's pretty, Papa."

Papa swallows hard, and his eyes are shiny. And his voice is rough, accent thicker than usual, when he replies, “She is, isn’t she?”

Then he lifts Adam up, sketchbook and all, and sits down before settling Adam back down on his lap. He points to the word in the corner of the page and says “Mischa. That was her name.”

“Was?”

“She’s no longer with us.”

Adam considers this. “Where is she, then?”

Papa’s arm tightens around her waist. “She isn’t anywhere at all, I’m afraid. She died, a long time ago.”

Adam runs his finger along the curve of her smile. The girl in the drawing looks so happy. So small. She’s the same age as Adam, or close to it. It had never occurred to him that people his age could die. Dying was something grownups did, when they got very, very old. “But she’s little.”

“I know.” Papa’s voice sounds tight, like there’s something caught in his throat, and Adam leans back to rest his weight against Papa’s chest. “She was my little sister.”

“Like how Abby is *my* sister?”

Adam feels Papa nod. “You know how Abby takes care of you when your daddy and I aren’t here? I took care of my Mischa the same way.”

Adam hums, tracing the lines that form his long-dead aunt with his eyes and his fingers. In the picture, she is alive and healthy and happy. Adam thinks he likes her better that way than imagining her gone. Thinks about how he would feel if Abby was gone, and then immediately shoves that thought away because it *hurts*.

“Would she have liked me?”

Papa presses his face into Adam’s hair and Adam pretends not to notice the wetness on his face as he kisses the top of Adam’s head.

“My *brangus berniukas*, she would have adored you.”

Chapter End Notes

Mielasis: Lithuanian for “dear/darling/sweetheart”, a general endearment similar to *cherie* in French.

Brangus berniukas: Lithuanian for “dear boy.”

interruptions and the lack thereof

Chapter Notes

> NOTE THE RATING BUMP!!! I don't know if smut will become a regular thing in this silly little series, but my Twitter followers voted for sexytimes, and so sexytimes they shall receive. I've said it before and I'll say it again, I'm an asexual little nugget, so any weirdness/awkwardness is down to my own inexperience. Please don't judge me too hard.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is fairly certain he hasn't had sex since the night Adam was conceived. It's the last time he remembers getting drunk, and he can only bear to have sex when he's drunk, when his brain is dulled and numbed by alcohol so that he doesn't have to deal with his own emotions reflecting the ones around him. So, as far as Will can tell, he hasn't had sexual contact with anyone other than his own hand in five years. A bit of a dry spell, one might say.

In the same way one might say Noah's Ark ran into a bit of rain.

Which is why the first time Hannibal backs him against the wall of his study and kisses him until he can't breathe, Will moans like a three-dollar whore and almost sees stars then and there. Hannibal laughs, actually fucking laughs, right into his mouth, and Will scolds him with a nip of teeth against his bottom lip that does nothing to deter at all.

If there's one thing Will is grateful for in that moment, it's the uncanny way he and Hannibal have always been able to read each other — It makes it easy to understand each other now, when he's breathless and desperate and not able to form whole sentences.

"Oh," He yelps when Hannibal shoves his knee between Will's legs, and the friction is so nice that Will can't help but grind down onto it, heedless of the layers between them, "I-I've never—"

"Never with a man?" Hannibal murmurs, trailing a path of kisses down his neck that burn as Will throws his head back to feel the scrape of teeth.

"N-Never sober. I always — It's so *much*. Too much sensation."

Hannibal hums, mouth pressed to the pulsepoint in Will's throat, and Will groans as he sucks at the sensitive skin. It will bruise, he knows and it thrills him, just as much as he can sense it thrills Hannibal. "People let their mental barriers down in the face of sexual intimacy, and in your case, your empathy overwhelms you."

"*Yes*," Will gasps, because Jesus Christ, his psychiatrist boyfriend analyzing him right now should not be sexy, but the realization that, finally, there's someone who understands feels so

fucking *good*.

“With all the physical sensation and intense emotions associated with sex,” and Will is amazed that Hannibal is coherent enough to talk about psychology, but the breathless strain in his voice is gratifying, “It becomes too much sensory input for you to handle.”

He nods, burying his hands in Hannibal’s hair and yanking him up to claim his mouth, until his lungs burn from lack of air. “Being drunk helps,” he pants against Hannibal’s lips, “It dulls things, makes it easier to just feel the touching and not what whoever I’m with is feeling.”

“You aren’t drunk now.” Hannibal’s nose bumps lightly against his, a tiny gesture of playful affection that somehow stokes the fire in Will’s belly even higher.

It makes him even surer when he says, “I *want* to feel you.”

It’s so good. It’s *so fucking good.* Feeling Hannibal’s desire, his adoration, the lust pouring into him pooling with the lust Will already feels and leaving him a keening mess as they grind against each other, fully clothed but so desperate it doesn’t matter. All that matters is them, grasping and kissing and touching and *God, fuck*, it’s so much, it’s so good—

From down the hall, a sleepy little voice calls, “Daddy?” and Will almost fucking cries.

Will wakes to teeth on his earlobe, tugging gently as Hannibal breathes “Will? Wake up, my darling. *Mylimasis, mon coeur, tesoro*, wake up for me, hmm?”

“*Wha-at?*” Will groans, burying his face in his pillow. He might be whining, just a little, but, honestly, he deserves to. He’d been sleeping so well, and that’s a rarity when you’re the parent of a five year old, and at any moment, your rest could be interrupted by a small torpedo launching itself into your bed. It’s a wonder he’s not waking up to knees in his kidney.

And then he realizes that it’s *Hannibal* waking him up. If Hannibal is waking him, and not Adam, that means…

He rolls onto his back, blinking his eyes open to see Hannibal sitting on the edge of his bed, smiling as he trails his fingers along Will’s chest, toying briefly with his nipples to watch Will gasp and shiver in response.

“You’re here,” Will says, sleep lengthening his vowels and slurring his consonants.

“I am.” Hannibal seems as pleased as the metaphorical cat who caught the canary, watching Will with bright, hungry eyes.

“Adam?”

“Fast asleep. The both of you must be having a lazy day, I expected you for breakfast an hour ago.”

“Shit,” Will sighs, “Sorry. Long day yesterday.”

Hannibal hums in response, swinging his legs up onto the bed. He’s in loose slacks and a simple button-down — Remarkably casual for him. And, Will realizes, with the slow awareness of the just-woken, easy to remove.

“What time did Adam go to bed last night, my love?”

“Mmm… Around six-ish, why?”

“Because,” Hannibal trails a hand down Will’s chest, stopping at the bottom of his ribs and letting the warm flat of his palm rest there, “Children his age need approximately ten hours of sleep a night. And it’s currently nine a.m., giving us… roughly an hour of privacy.”

Oh. Well, *there’s* an idea.

“‘M sleepy,” Will mumbles, still awash in the warm golden haze of being half-awake, “You’ll have to do all the work.”

Hannibal’s breath tickles against his stomach as he leans over and starts kissing his way down Will’s body. “Gladly.”

Will reaches down, laces his fingers into Hannibal’s ruffled morning hair, and bucks his hips lazily in encouragement, suddenly very glad that he sleeps only in boxers. “Get to it, then.”

Hannibal’s long, musician’s fingers are just wrapping around the root of Will’s cock when he hears the telltale creak of the stairs and Adam’s voice floats down. “I saw Hamble’s car outside! Did he come for breffast?”

Will bites his own hand so hard he’s half-sure it will bleed, as Hannibal springs away from him and off the bed with a hissed, “*Putain d'enfer!*”

Will lets himself into the house, follows his instincts to the kitchen, and wraps his arms around Hannibal’s waist, pressing his face to the broad, warm expanse of his shoulder as his boyfriend cooks. “Hey, you.”

“Well, hello,” Hannibal rumbles a low laugh, and Will stretches up on his toes to hook his chin over Hannibal’s shoulder and peer down at the chopping board Hannibal is working away at.

“Is anything on the stove or in the oven right now?” Will asks.

“Not at the moment,” replies Hannibal, “I was just starting on the preparations.”

Will hums in reply and turns his head to kiss Hannibal’s neck. “Excellent.”

“And why is that, may I ask?”

“Because,” Will murmurs, lips brushing against warm skin, “I talked Bev into babysitting tonight.”

Hannibal goes statue-still and Will hears the clink of a knife being slowly sat down. After that, things happen very fast. The next thing Will remembers clearly, he’s tumbling onto Hannibal’s bed with a breathless laugh, and Hannibal is scrambling overtop of him like he’s starving and Will is an all-you-can-eat buffet.

He, as Will had expected, takes his time. Rather too much time, in Will’s humble and horny opinion, but he’s not really in the mood to argue when he’s so close to getting what he wants; so overwhelmed by the heady cocktail of Hannibal’s desire and his own that he’s shaking just at the sound of Hannibal slicking his fingers with lube.

The stretch as Hannibal works him open is delicious, so good that Will finds himself arching, shifting his hips to force Hannibal’s talented fingers further, deeper. Then, with a curious little noise, Hannibal crooks his fingers *just so* and Will feels like a bowstring that’s just been released, his whole body snapping and reverberating with pleasure.

“Fu-*Fuck*, do that again!” He groans, and Hannibal obliges. He feels like every nerve in his body has lit up at once, everything screaming with sensation. It’s so much, almost too much, and Will is so, so tired of waiting. “Hannibal,” He should really be embarrassed by how needy and wanton he sounds, but he can’t muster up the emotion in the face of this. “*Please*.”

Hannibal leans down, kisses him ravenously. He takes hold of one of Will’s legs and hauls it over his shoulder, swallowing Will’s moan when the movement shifts Hannibal’s fingers inside him. He removes them then, and pulls away, smiling when Will whines at the sudden emptiness.

“Patience, *mano grožis,*” He chides, and the soft crinkle of foil makes Will shiver with anticipation.

It’s not painful, given the thorough preparation Hannibal had given him, but the slight burn as Will’s muscles stretch and flutter to accommodate him feels so incredible that Will gasps. With one leg over Hannibal’s shoulder, Hannibal’s arms bracketing him as Hannibal leans to hover over him, Hannibal filling him up, he feels entirely surrounded. *Consumed* . Their eyes meet, and Will is almost overcome with the warmth, the lust and love that flow from Hannibal into himself.

“You’re so beautiful, my love,” Hannibal whispers, and Will moans in response because even if he doesn’t think that’s true, he can feel how much Hannibal means it, how much Hannibal loves him. And somehow, unlike every time he’s tried sober sex before, the emotions don’t overwhelm him. They make it so much better.

He reaches up, threads his fingers into Hannibal’s hair, and yanks. “Hannibal, if you don’t start fucking me properly *right now*…”

He never gets to finish his threat because Hannibal apparently takes his words to heart and Will soon loses the ability to form coherent sentences.

Chapter End Notes

Mylimasis: Lithuanian for “beloved”

Mon coeur: French for “my heart”

Tesoro: Italian for “treasure”

Putain d'enfer: French for “fucking hell”

Mano grožis: Lithuanian for “my beauty”

history repeats

Adam lasts two days in his "stay away from Nigel Banyai" plan.

On the third day, Nigel plops himself down across from Adam at lunch and asks, "Have you been avoiding me, Adam?"

Adam simply says "Yes," before taking another bite of his mac n cheese.

Adam hates liars, after all. He refuses to be one. If Adam had been in Nigel's position, he'd have accepted that answer and left. But clearly, Adam isn't that lucky, because Nigel leans forward, elbows braced on the table, and prompts, "Why is that?"

Adam swallows his food. Ponders the question and all the possible answers he could give. Decides, for the first time he can recall, to tell a deliberate lie.

"I don't find you that interesting."

Nigel laughs, loud and boisterous and enough to draw every eye in the cafeteria to them. He throws his head back when he laughs, like a little kid. It's strangely charming. "You will."

Adam watches silently as Nigel picks at his lunch of pizza and applesauce. Adam hasn't ever had the school-provided lunches, his papa insisting that no son of his was going to eat such pathetic excuses for food, but he's heard from practically everyone that school pizza tastes like soggy cardboard. If that's true, he can't blame Nigel for not being more enthused about his meal.

His attention is caught by something he'd noticed before but hadn't had the chance to look at properly before — Nigel has a tattoo on the side of his neck. It's a woman, and though it's hard to tell with black ink on skin, she doesn't appear to be wearing many clothes. What an odd thing to want to put on your body. Adam continues his eating, stealing glances every so often at the tattoo, observing how it ripples as Nigel eats and moves. It makes it look like the woman is dancing.

"What are you looking at, gorgeous?" Nigel asks with a little grin, as if he and Adam are sharing some kind of exciting secret. Adam notes, once again, the use of an endearment rather than his name, but the soft flutter in his belly at the smile and the compliment makes him bite his lip rather than correct him again.

He looks down at the worn plastic table and feels his cheeks flush with heat as he stutters, "You— You have a lady on your neck."

Nigel's secretive smile grows, a wide, lopsided thing. Some of his teeth are just slightly crooked. Adam wonders, absently, if that ever bothers him. "So I do. You were looking at her?"

"She dances," Adam replies, "When you move your head, and when you swallow."

“I’d never thought about that,” Nigel replies, “But, hey, if you don’t think I’m interesting, at least you think *she* is.”

Adam inhales sharply, taking a gulp of his drink rather than answering.

“The foreign exchange boy sat with me at lunch today,” Adam reports at supper, twirling his fork in his fettuccine alfredo.

“I hope you were polite,” Papa says, bland and perfunctory — He knows Adam always at least *tries* to be polite, even if sometimes he messes up because he’s not good with social clues.

Adam shrugs. “I told him I didn’t find him that interesting.”

At the same moment, both his fathers look up sharply. Both of them are clearly trying not to smile, but the laugh lines around their eyes have gone deep and crinkly, like they’re holding back. And then their eyes meet, and both of them are bursting into laughter, loud and unabashed. Adam looks back and forth between them, trying to figure out what’s so funny and feeling like he’s been left out of some private joke between them.

He sets his fork down, appetite suddenly gone. “You’re laughing at me.”

“No,” Dad’s voice is practically a wheeze, forced out through his laughter, “Baby, no, we--” But he can’t seem to finish his explanation, trailing off into another bout of helpless giggles.

“We aren’t laughing at you, my love,” Papa continues for him, his voice a little more controlled despite the rumble of laughter that threads through his words, “We’re laughing because your father said the same thing to me the first time we shared a meal.”

Adam considers that, decides it would probably seem funny to him if he was in their place. But something nags at him. “But you did find him interesting,” He says to Dad, narrowing his eyes, “I remember. You came home after that case and told me the stupid mind-doctor made you food and you couldn’t even be mad ‘cause it was good food.”

“Is that so?” Papa chuckles, obviously delighted, and Adam realizes that Dad must never have told him that part of the story.

Dad hisses something at Adam that might be *snitch* , but his tone is so amused and fond that any sting at the insult is instantly soothed.

“And then Nigel said ‘you will.’”

The laughter starts up anew.

aperitif

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind," says the stranger, and Will returns his gaze to him, annoyed by his presumption but intrigued by his astuteness. "Your values and decency are present, yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams." Despite his earlier little rant, Will meets his eyes. The man's gaze is steady. Understanding. "No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love."

Will thinks of Adam, of the trust he blindly offers Will, because in his mind, his daddy is a superhero, is the beginning and end of everything, his daddy cannot be anything but good, and he doesn't know the horrors Will sees behind his eyelids. Of his son's gentleness and innocence, and how Will is afraid every day that he will destroy that. As if some of the rot and ruin of Will's brain could rub off when he touches Adam, infect the pure goodness that makes him the light Will stumbles through the darkness for.

How it feels wrong to come home from studying murder, from placing himself in the minds of killers, and care for Adam. To hold his son with arms he's just recently imagined using to take lives. How sometimes he is afraid to touch, for fear that the blood he pictures on his hands might taint his precious son.

Somehow, this stranger's deep, accented voice, his gently probing words and reassuring eyes, makes him want to tell him those secret fears. To expel the horror from his gut as if it were bile, pour everything out like a confessional. *Forgive me, father, for I dream of sin* . And that is what makes it click, makes his brow furrow and his jaw clench with outrage. "Whose profile are you working on?" He turns to Jack, furious at the deception, as the stranger shifts uncomfortably. "Whose profile is he working on?"

"I'm sorry, Will," The man -- Doctor Lecter, Jack had called him -- sighs, but he doesn't sound contrite in the slightest. "Observing is what we do. I can't shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off."

Observation and understanding are skills Lecter, as a psychiatrist, has chosen to focus on and hone. For Will, it has never been a choice. His talent has been forced upon him by his own brain, like a curse. It is outrage at the doctor's nerve to compare the two that puts venom in his voice as he spits, "Please, don't psychoanalyze me. You won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed."

"Will," Jack says, stern and disapproving. It's the same tone Will uses with Adam when Adam has unintentionally been rude, and he needs to prompt his son into apologizing. The notion of Jack treating him, thinking of him, as a child needing to be taken in hand, makes his blood boil.

"Now, if you'll excuse me," He stands, "I have to go give a lecture. On psychoanalyzing."

When he walks into Abigail Hobbs's hospital room, Dr Lecter is there. Chin on his chest, he sleeps holding Abigail's hand. Will thinks of all the times he has slept in a chair beside Adam's bed when he's unwell; or all the times in his infancy that his crib went unused because Will couldn't stand the thought of being away from him.

He turns to the small figure at his side and holds a finger to his lips, motioning with his head towards where Lecter and Abigail sleep. Adam nods solemnly and lets Will lead him to the couch, settling in Will's lap after he sits and leaning against his chest as he dozes. Will runs a hand through his curls, murmuring soft words of love and safety.

His gaze returns to Dr. Lecter. Both of them drawn to the bedside of the girl they'd orphaned and saved. Both of them comforting, as best they could, a sleeping child. *You and I,* hums Lecter's voice from his memory, *We're just alike.*

Chapter End Notes

If you're interested in sneak-peeks, writing updates and general shitposting and clownery and you don't already follow, my Twitter is "abstractwtcolor"

the inspector

Chapter Notes

> A QUICK NOTE: This chapter contains both smut and murder. If you don't want to read those things, stop after the first break. Also, the smut contains some knifeplay, unwilling voyeurism, and some... noncon/dubcon play, I guess you'd call it. Will and Hannibal are putting on a show of sorts for Pazzi, and Pazzi, whose POV we see the smut through, believes he's witnessing a rape, but it all happens with Will's full and enthusiastic consent.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They are a charming family. The older man is tall, with the sort of classical, austere elegance of ancient statues, and devastatingly charismatic. His husband, smaller and slimmer, but handsome in a softer, more approachable way than his husband, quiet and observant. And of course, the children, a teenage girl and a little boy, two dark-haired, blue-eyed angels with all the cherubic loveliness of youth. Rinaldo Pazzi has been watching them for days, observing and studying. The one, of course, he had recognized immediately, but the presence of the others had thrown him off. He hadn't profiled *Il Mostro* to be the sort to attach himself to a family in his attempt to blend in.

And yet there he was, the man Pazzi had seen years ago, sitting before the *Primavera* once again, but with a child in his lap, speaking quietly to the boy as he sketched in the book resting on the child's legs. It would be an endearing sight, if only Pazzi didn't know that the doting father was a beast in human form. An intervention would have to be made before Pazzi continued, for the sake of the husband and children.

"*Signore,*" He greets, approaching the man who stands a few feet back from the bench where his family sits. The younger man turns, taking him in with keen, dark blue eyes.

"Have we met?" The man replies in slow, hesitant Italian. An American, by his accent, and not one used to international travel.

"We haven't," Pazzi says, switching to English for the other's comfort, "But I wished to introduce myself. Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi, at your service."

"Will Graham," A small, hesitant pause and then, "Graham-Lecter. Still getting used to that, sorry." A quick glance downward, at the ring on his left hand, and then back towards the rest of his family, a tender smile on his face, confirms what the words had made Pazzi suspect. They are newly married. Perhaps, he hopes, that will make it easier to bear the truth when it comes out. Whoever Will Graham-Lecter is, he surely deserves better than a murderer for a husband. "What can I do for you, sir?"

Pazzi clears his throat. This part will require some delicacy, at the very least. "Have you ever heard of the Monster of Florence, Mr. Graham-Lecter?"

Something dark flashes in the man's blue eyes, just for a moment, before he blinks and gives Pazzi a befuddled look. "I haven't, no."

Pazzi puts a hand lightly to his unlucky companion's elbow, despite how he stiffens at the contact, and guides him out into the hallway. Better for the rest of this conversation to have a little privacy. The man and children on the bench don't seem to notice the departure of one of their number. They stand just outside the entryway to the room where *Primavera* hangs. Graham-Lecter can keep an eye on his family, and Pazzi can keep an eye on his monster. "He terrorized the city, twenty years ago. It was his custom to arrange his victims to mimic beautiful paintings, and leave them in public for people to find. "

"Like a Botticelli?" Graham-Lecter asks, his gaze flickering to the room, the painting, and to his family sitting before it. As he and Pazzi watch, the man lifts a hand to point at something within the image, speaking animatedly to the boy on his lap and the girl at his side. The children must be Graham-Lecter's, Pazzi thinks, both all blue eyes and brown hair, like the man he stands before. That will make it easier for the three of them to detach themselves from the monster.

"Exactly like a Botticelli," Pazzi confirms, drawing a photo of the Primavera murder from his bag and offering it to the American, who takes it with wide eyes. "*Il Mostro* created images that live in my mind to this day. The garlanded nymph on the right, flowers streaming from her mouth, with the young god reaching for her… it matches exactly with the display of this couple in Impruneta."

"Inspiration," Graham-Lecter says softly, and Pazzi nods.

"Revelation is the development of an image, first blurred, then coming clear. To find the inspiration *Il Mostro* used was a triumph. I came here, and I stood before the *Primavera*, just as we do now, day after day. And most days, I'd see a young Lithuanian man, as transfixed by the Botticelli as I was; as I imagined *Il Mostro* would be. Every day I saw him, he would recreate the painting in pencil, just as he did in flesh."

Graham-Lecter's fingers tighten, just minutely, around the photograph of the murder. "You met him here. *Il Mostro*."

Pazzi pulls another photo from his pocket, holds it up for the unfortunate newlywed to see -- Hannibal Lecter, twenty years younger. "I met your husband. The Monster of Florence."

Slowly, the younger man reaches out, snatches the picture from Pazzi's hand and pulls it closer to examine it. For a long moment, he is utterly still and silent, as though the old photo is Medusa and has turned him to stone with a look. Finally, he looks up, eyes wide and startled. "You think my husband is a serial killer?"

His voice trembles and Pazzi's worn old heart aches for this poor, ill-starred man who had unknowingly given his heart to a beast who would devour it; who had entrusted his children in their little red hoods to the wolf himself.

“I’m sorry to have to tell you these things.” He says, and truly means it, “I knew then who he was. It was an epiphany that made me famous and then ruined me. In haste and the heat of ambition, the Questura nearly destroyed his home, looking for evidence.”

The monster’s husband blinks at him, confused and overwhelmed. “If you had found any, he’d have been in prison a long time ago.”

“None was found,” Pazzi admits, “I assume he must have somehow caught on to my suspicion and somehow destroyed any evidence. Another man, not an innocent man, but innocent of those crimes, was convicted on no evidence other than his character. And the real *Il Mostro* walked free.”

“You still suspect him?”

“I am still certain of what I know, *Signore* Graham-Lecter.”

The American flinches at the sound of the surname he had been so proud of minutes ago, and Pazzi knows he is convinced.

“And you came to me.”

“I need your help. I need you to… provoke him. Get him to tell you something, or show you something, anything that can incriminate him. He’s still killing, I’m sure. Men like him don’t stop until good men stop them.”

Will Graham looks back towards the room, his beautiful children in the arms of a murderer, and asks softly, “Don’t monsters still have packs, Inspector?”

Pazzi hands him a business card.

“Inspector Pazzi?” Will Graham’s voice trembles down the phone line, hushed and breathy and unsteady. It sets off alarm bells in Pazzi’s head instantly.

“*Signore* Graham,” He replies, unsettled, “How can I help you?”

“Please,” Graham’s voice cracks, “I.. I need…” The poor man is breathing heavily, sounding on the verge of tears, and Pazzi instinctively springs into action.

“What’s going on?”

He whimpers, and Pazzi curses himself for not spiriting the man and his children away right from the gallery. “I… I asked him about the *Il Mostro* murders. He…” Another soft whimper, like he’s in pain, “He went crazy on me. Started yelling, throwing things, hitting me,” There’s a noise nearby, like some sort of impact, and Graham groans, “*Oh God*.”

“Where are you now, *Signore* Graham?” Pazzi asks, grabbing his keys and rushing for his car.

“A hotel. He’s -- *Shit, fuck* -- He’s in the bathroom. I barricaded him in.”

What a clever young man. "That's good. That's very good. Just give me the address and the room number."

Graham gasps it out, between whimpers and groans and small sounds of pain. He must be a fighter, that Graham, to hold his own against such a brute.

"Everything will be alright, *Signore*. I'll be there soon to help you."

"Please hurry -- Oh, God, *please*."

When Pazzi arrives, Will Graham is a mess. Trembling, sweat-soaked and glassy-eyed, with bruises on his arms and neck, and more, Pazzi is certain, where he cannot see. He looks like a doe frozen in the headlights, terrified but unable to flee, paralyzed with fear.

"Where are your children?" Pazzi asks as Graham lets him into the room.

"At the apartment we rented," Graham murmurs, "I told him I wanted privacy tonight, and six year olds aren't great at that."

Pazzi throws him a look of sympathy. At least his children are safely out of reach. Graham closes the door as Pazzi ventures further into the room. He hears another door open, and the monster himself emerges. Pazzi thinks, for just a moment, how odd it is that he apparently got past Graham's barricade so easily.

Lecter is disheveled, hair falling into his wild eyes, his shirt half-buttoned, panting as he eyes them. He holds a knife in one hand.

"Hannibal," Graham whispers.

He moves as if in a trance, slipping past Pazzi's attempt to stop him and going to his husband willingly.

"My Will," Lecter cradles his husband's face in his palm. A monster cannot be capable of love, but there is a sort of awful tenderness in his animal eyes that makes Pazzi's skin crawl. Then that hand moves to grip the back of Graham's neck and he shoves the slighter man against the wall with a snarl. "Traitorous bitch."

Graham gasps, back curving away from the pain of impact with the wall. It does nothing but arch his throat against the knife in Lecter's hand. He groans, hands scrabbling uselessly at his husband's back.

Pazzi has a gun, but he cannot use it. Not with Lecter so close to Graham, not with a knife at an innocent man's throat. If Pazzi were to shoot, Lecter's body would jerk… and Graham would, in all likelihood, die. Pazzi can only watch, dread like an ulcer in his gut.

"You would deny me my life," rumbles the beast, and his helpless mate trembles.

"N—No, not your life, no."

“My freedom, then, you’d take that from me.”

Neither of them seem to care that Pazzi is in the room. For the savage intimacy of the scene, they could be entirely alone.

“Hannibal,” Graham whimpers, “Hannibal, please.”

Lecter growls, wordless, and then there is the sharp noise of a zipper, twice. Pazzi, realizing his intentions, almost chokes on his horror. “No,” He pleads, the first sound he’s made since the man entered, the first word he’s ever addressed directly to the Monster of Florence. “No, don’t, please don’t.”

In one harsh grasp of fabric, he yanks Graham’s pants and underwear down, seizing him by the hip with his free hand to hitch one leg up around Lecter’s own hastily-bared waist.

“Stop!” But despite Pazzi’s distressed cry, Lecter snaps his hips harshly and Will Graham *screams*.

Pazzi can do nothing but stare, an unwilling voyeur to a horrific coupling. He cannot intervene without putting Graham’s life and his own in danger. All he can do is bear witness and be thankful that the poor man’s children are not here.

Graham’s head lolls back, his throat pressing further against the knife in Lecter’s grip. A thin beading of crimson wells up beneath the silver of the blade, and Pazzi wonders just how much worse this can get.

It’s animalistic, the way in which the monster fucks his husband against the wall, unyielding and ceaseless despite Pazzi’s continued feeble pleas for him to stop; aggressive and brutal with no sign of care for Graham at all. The helpless, broken sounds the poor man makes as Lecter pounds into him might as well be knives in Pazzi’s heart.

Then Lecter hauls Graham’s other leg upward too, both legs wrapping around his own waist, and something changes. Lecter’s relentless thrusting doesn’t slow or stop, only start going faster, somehow harder, and Graham… the cries wrenched out of Graham change, pitching higher and faster, words beginning to tumble from his mouth.

“Oh God, oh fuck, *Hannibal* — Darlin’, please, *yes*— ”

It feels as though Pazzi’s blood has been suddenly replaced with lead. He’s been, somehow, deceived. He takes a step back, hoping that they are distracted enough for him to flee. The knife that had been in Lecter’s hand just moments ago sails past his head and lodges in the door. It is only through a sting and a trickle of warmth that Pazzi realizes the blade had knicked his ear as it whizzed by.

“ *Commendatore*,” *Il Mostro* rasps, “I think it would be wisest of you not to move.”

“Don’t worry, baby,” Graham gasps, “I locked the door.”

“What a cunning boy you are.”

Pazzi wants to close his eyes, look away, but he cannot manage it. He's transfixed by fascinated horror.

"Now, old friend," Lecter pants, not looking away from his husband, "You understand that I have been terribly unkind to my poor darling. Making him wait for his release until you joined us."

He thinks of Graham's dishevelment when he arrived, the dazed shaking and bruised neck and wrists. Not the result of a struggle, not of abuse, but of sex.

"Even when he was on the phone telling you of my cruelty, I denied him."

The strain of the American's voice, the groans and pleas Pazzi had thought were signs of his exhaustion and fear… Had Lecter been fucking him as Graham begged for Pazzi's protection?

A particularly harsh thrust, and Graham keens, the same wounded and desperate noise that had spurred Pazzi out of his bed.

"It would be unspeakably rude of me to go on tormenting him, of course. So I must ask you to be patient while I tend to him." Just for a moment, Lecter turns his head, and the vicious grin on his face sends shivers down Pazzi's spine.

Lecter must have had him quite worked up before Pazzi arrives, because it doesn't take long before Graham is shuddering in his husband's arms with a scream on his lips as he reaches his peak. He goes boneless, melting against Lecter with a sated, exhausted sigh. And Lecter, monster though he may be, is all tenderness, gentling and soothing as he carries his mate to the large double bed the hotel provides, depositing him with a kiss to the forehead and a murmur that Pazzi can't quite make out. Then he turns, shirt unbuttoned and bottom half bare, and eyes Pazzi, backed against the locked door. He springs forward and the world goes dark.

"Can you hear me, *Commendatore*?"

Pazzi blinks the haze from his eyes to find Lecter peering down at him, patting his cheek with a gloved hand. Wearing pants again, which is a small mercy, but shirtless. As Pazzi struggles and realizes that he is tied and gagged, he can't spare a thought to be grateful for it.

"Take a deep breath while you can. Clear your head." And then the man is behind him, pushing the cart Pazzi is bound to towards the window. "You know, I haven't had a bite all day."

"I think my neck would disagree with that statement, thank you." drawls Graham's voice, and Pazzi turns his head to see the man lounging on the bed, in nothing but an unbuttoned shirt that is too big to be his own, watching the proceedings with interest. Sure enough, a string of purpling bite marks adorn his throat like a collar.

“To eat, you horrible creature,” Lecter retorts, and the playful fondness in his voice makes Pazzi’s gut churn. “Actually, dear inspector, your liver and kidneys would be suitable for dinner right away. Tonight, even. But the rest of the meat should hang for at least a week, in the current cool conditions.” Opening the wide windows and gathering up a length of bright orange extension cord, he looks over Pazzi’s shoulder towards the bed with a bright smile. “I didn’t see the forecast, did you, darling?”

“I didn’t, no.”

“And you?” Lecter meets Pazzi’s eyes, expression curious and patient, as if he’s truly waiting for an answer. As if Pazzi could give one with his mouth duct-taped shut. “I gather that means no.” He looks down, doing something with the cord that Pazzi can’t see.

“Did you tell the police your suspicions about my husband?” Graham says, appearing on his other side, “You might as well be honest, given the circumstances.”

Pazzi shakes his head.

“Excellent. It would be a shame to end my honeymoon with Hannibal in prison. Once we deal with you and clean up after ourselves, we can go on enjoying vacation.”

“See how history repeats itself, my love,” Lecter slips an orange noose over his head, tightening it around Pazzi’s neck before he picks up a knife from a small table. “Our friend here is a Pazzi of *the* Pazzis. His ancestor, Francesco, attempted to assassinate Lorenzo the Magnificent at church, in the middle of Mass, in 1478.”

Graham clicks his tongue, disapproving. “At Mass? Don’t think God looked too kindly on that.”

“Nor did Lorenzo. He survived, wounded, but his brother, Giuliano, was murdered, right there in the church he prayed in. In his vengeance, Lorenzo had the entire Pazzi family brought low. Franceso, in particular, who had stabbed poor Giuliano himself, was hanged for his trouble. Some say he was disemboweled, other illustrations of the events leave his insides in their original places.”

“Would you like to buy a bowel?”

Lecter laughs, low and throaty, like he means it, and the sound makes every hair on Pazzi’s body stand on end. “So, *Commendatore,* which do you think? Bowels out or bowels in?”

“Out, I think,” hums Graham, and Lecter nods.

“As you wish, beloved.”

Then the knife slashes down, Graham gives the cart a hard shove, and the last thing Pazzi hears is Graham’s voice.

“You said men like him need good men to stop them. But he and I, we’re just alike.”

Chapter End Notes

If there's interest, I might do another Uffizi Gallery chapter with more fluff, giving Adam's innocent POV of looking at pictures with Papa and Abby while Daddy talks to the strange man.

In my documents, this chapter was labeled "Rinaldo Pazzi and the Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day".

dreams

Chapter Notes

TW FOR THIS CHAPTER: Disturbing dream imagery, including harm coming to Adam. Nothing actually happens to him, however, and he is perfectly fine.

"Dad?" Abigail calls, and it's the most natural thing in the world to turn from the sink as she holds the phone out to him.

He blinks and it's Adam, standing on a kitchen chair to reach the phone base on the wall. His eyes are bright and serious as Will takes the phone from his little hand. "It's for you."

He blinks again and the kitchen is gone. They're in the woods outside his house, dark and misty. Adam is still standing on a chair, arms outstretched like he does when he wants to be held. Will obliges, holding his son securely against his chest and pressing a kiss to his unruly curls. He needs to get Adam out of the woods, he knows, but something is keeping him there, calling to him. In the distance, he can hear the sound of heavy hoofbeats.

"Daddy?" He mumbles into Will's chest.

"Yes?"

It's Abigail's voice that answers, from just over his shoulder. "There's someone else here."

From the darkness of the trees, the black stag emerges slowly. Adam gasps, leaning forward enough to almost topple from Will's arms as he reaches for it with grasping, curious hands.

"Like this, see?" He guides Abigail's arm to help her cast, grinning when the flick of their wrists sends the colored fishing line soaring and Abigail gasps in delight. Behind him, water splashes, and he turns his head to see Adam waddling through the stream towards them, his little neon green waders squelching in the silt and mud. Assured that Abigail can manage the pole on her own, Will turns and scoops his boy into his arms, balancing Adam against his hip with a well-practiced ease that cares little for the water the movement splashes down one side of him.

"Look, Daddy," Adam says, pointing. Will follows his gesture and freezes. On the far bank of the stream stands the stag, oil-black fur and feathers alight under the sun. It is still and silent, watching the trio in the water with an eerie keenness.

Will blinks and his arms are empty. Adam stands across the stream, reaching up to touch the stag. Will's breath catches in his throat at the thought of his son so close to those hard, heavy

hooves, those wicked-sharp antlers. He thinks of Cassie Boyle in the field, of the room in Hobbs's cabin that he'd used to bleed girls dry, and shouts, "Adam, don't!"

But the stag does not charge or trample, only lowers his great head with a huff to press his snout into Adam's little hand, patiently allowing the child to stroke his velvety nose and run his fingers through the ruff of feathers at his chest. Adam is entirely captivated, gazing up at the strange creature with a tender sort of awe and crooning softly to it. The stag nuzzles the boy, who lays his head against the creature's chest, perfectly content.

Will is standing in a kitchen. At first, he thinks it's the Hobbs family's kitchen, then his own. They seem to flicker, back and forth, around him. He stands backed into a corner. Adam squirms in his arms, frantic and terrified, and Will wonders why for a moment before he realizes that he's holding a knife to his son's throat. Some small, distant part of him rebels -- He would never! He would rather die than harm Adam! But he cannot seem to make himself lower the blade.

Hannibal stands in the doorway, his hands trembling as he points Will's own gun at him.

"He's mine," Will says, "You can't have him. I can't lose him."

"He's going to leave you," Hannibal replies, voice shaking, "He's going to leave you, and everything you've done for him will be for nothing."

Adam is sobbing softly. Will wishes he would just be quiet. Doesn't he get it? Doesn't he understand, that this is love? That Will knows no other way to keep Adam with him permanently, to keep him close and safe forever? It has to be this way. Will hates to frighten him, hates to hurt him, but there's no other way. Adam has to die to be safe.

"I'm sorry," Will murmurs in his son's ear, "I'm so sorry. I'm doing this for you, to protect you. It'll all be over soon, baby, I promise. Daddy's gonna make it all go away. I love you."

He drags the knife across Adam's throat, feels his precious son's blood flow over his hands like a baptism.

Hannibal, hands still shaking, fires.

Will's eyes snap open. He's shivering, sweaty and cold at the same time. Frantically, he stumbles out of bed and up the stairs. Adam is exactly where he should be, asleep in his bed, perfectly fine and healthy and uninjured. Letting out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding, Will sits on the edge of his bed. Smooths his hand over Adam's starry comforter, runs his fingers through Adam's sleep-mussed curls, presses a kiss to his little forehead.

As he pulls back, his son stirs, eyes blinking open, hazy and still mostly asleep. "Daddy?"

"Hey," Will breathes, cupping Adam's cheek in his palm, "I didn't mean to wake you."

"Morning?"

“No, lamb, not morning yet. Just checking on you. Go back to sleep, it’s alright.”

Adam’s little fingers grab at his wrist. “Stay, Daddy.”

“Stay?” Will replies, a fond smile curving his lips, “Daddy can’t fit in your bed.”

Adam hums, nuzzling into the palm against his cheek. “Big bed.”

“You wanna go sleep in the big bed with Daddy?”

Adam nods, eyelids already fluttering with the effort to stay awake. Technically, Will shouldn’t allow it. Adam should be sleeping on his own, in his own space. Boundaries and growing up and all that. But with the afterimages of his terrifying dreams still in his mind, Will can’t bring himself to deny Adam anything, or to go back downstairs without him. With a sigh, he scoops his son into his arms.

“Okay, sweetheart, let’s go sleep in the big bed.”

bloodfest

Chapter Notes

> TW FOR THIS CHAPTER: Mizumono parallel, thus Mizumono-levels of violence and blood, including harm coming to Adam. Everything is fine in the end but please be mindful of your own limits and mental health.

"Hannibal," Will is shivering in the kitchen. "Hannibal, we don't have time. They know, they're coming, we need to *leave*."

Slowly, Hannibal steps forward, and Will comes to him without hesitation, so tender and sweet. A hand on his cheek, Hannibal reels him into a kiss. Will's lips are cool, rain-soaked as he is, but soft and gentle. Trusting.

The blade sinks home and Hannibal swallows Will's cry of shock and pain. He cuts, careful and precise, as Will grasps at him with shaking arms, a desperate clutch for support as blood starts to gush out of his abdomen. Hannibal lets Will fall against him, cradles him close and strokes his hair as his lover convulses. "How could they know?" He says in Will's ear, "I have always been so careful. How could they know unless you told them?"

Will's chin has come to rest on his shoulder, and Hannibal feels him shake his head. Hannibal clicks his tongue in disapproval. Even now, in this moment, Will chooses to lie to him? How disappointing. "Judas, too, betrayed with a kiss. Did Jack give you thirty pieces of silver for me, Will?"

The only answer he receives is a ragged gasp as Will trembles in his arms. No matter. The FBI closing in on him is all he needs to know from Will. Dropping his knife onto the counter, he strokes Will's hair again. "I was going to take you away from all this, you know. Do you understand?" He pulls back, just a little, just enough for he and Will to see each other's faces. For him to see the effect his words have. "A place was made for all of us, together. I wanted to surprise you. And you, you wanted to surprise me."

Will whimpers, and Hannibal lets him go, lets him fall with a groan against the gouged wall. Gasping, Will hauls himself, painfully, into a position close to sitting. His arms wrap across the bloody incision across his stomach, a futile attempt to keep the blood and viscera in its proper place.

"I let you know me," Hannibal accuses, voice low and rough with emotions he can no longer control, "See me. I gave you a rare gift. But you didn't want it."

"Didn't I?" Will whispers, staring up at him as he fights to stay conscious.

Hannibal sneers. Another manipulation. How could he have been so blinded as to not see it before? Love. He had given this man his heart, and all he had gotten in return was betrayal. "You would deny me my life."

Again, Will shakes his head. "N-No, not your life, no."

"My freedom, then," Hannibal spits, "You would take that from me. Confine me to a prison cell." He pauses, considering. "Did you believe you could change me, the way I've changed you?"

Will meets his eyes then. "I already did."

From the doorway behind Hannibal comes a shriek, confused and terrified. *"Daddy!"*

For just a moment, Hannibal freezes. Adam. How could he have forgotten about Adam? How long had the boy been standing there?

Adam runs past him, slipping and falling in the slick mess of blood and rainwater on the kitchen floor, but nevertheless stumbling to his father's side. He kneels beside Will, frantically patting at his arms and his chest, trying to figure out how to help but unable to. There is so much damage, so much blood, and Adam is only a little boy.

Still, he strokes Will's face with trembling little hands, offering what scant comfort he can. "Daddy," He whimpers, "Daddy, Daddy..."

"Baby," Will whispers back, and despite the pain he's in, offers him a feeble attempt at a smile. What a miraculous thing, the love of a parent. "I love you. I love you, okay?"

Hannibal watches, a silent witness to their pitiful goodbye. Then he takes a step forward. "I forgive you, Will. Will you forgive me?"

And Will's eyes, hazy and unfocused with pain, blow wide with realization. "Oh, no," He forces out, babbling in his desperate panic, "N-No— Don't. Oh, no. No, no."

Hannibal holds a hand out. "Adam. Come to me."

And, trusting as Abraham's Isaac, as a lamb led to slaughter, Adam does, slipping his hand into Hannibal's without hesitation. Adam is silent and pliant as Hannibal lifts him, Adam's back to his chest. Facing Will. The child whimpers faintly as Hannibal puts the blade to his throat.

"No, no, no!" Will pleads, face contorting with pain as he struggles to sit up, to reach, to somehow rescue his son. Adam's blood sprays across his face, and Will sobs, broken, as Hannibal lets the boy fall into his father's lap, gasping.

"You can make it all go away," Hannibal reminds him, leaning forward and brushing Will's curls out of his eyes as the other man frantically tries to staunch the flow of blood from Adam's little throat. "Put your head back. Close your eyes. Wade into the quiet of the stream."

He presses a gentle kiss to Adam's forehead, then to Will's lips, and leaves them behind to walk out into the rain.

"Hannibal!"

He opens his eyes and Will is there, shaking him, a look not of agony but worry marring his lovely face.

"Will?" And instinctively, his hand scrambles to the other's stomach. He feels the smooth, unblemished skin there, and lets out a sigh of relief.

"It's okay, you're okay," Will says, reaching under his own pajama top to fish Hannibal's hand out and bringing it to his lips, kissing Hannibal's knuckles. The early-morning sunlight bounces off the rings on their hands, and the sight helps ground him, helps remind him what's real and what isn't.

He is not in Baltimore, leaving his beloved and his child — their child — to bleed out in the kitchen. He's in Florence. On his honeymoon. Adam is in the room right next door, with Abigail. Safe and sound. Hannibal has not harmed them. Will not harm them.

"I hurt you," Hannibal murmurs, and it feels like a confession wrenched out of his chest. "I thought you'd betrayed me, and I hurt you.

"I'm right here," Will replies, laying his head on Hannibal's chest, "I'm fine. See?"

"I killed Adam." He whispers. It tastes like poison on his tongue, like he should be flayed alive for even speaking the words. It makes him want to vomit, or scream, or turn himself in. Anything to assuage the guilt that eats at him. He feels the urge to scrub his hands, though he knows they were only bloody in his dream. "To spite you. As Medea slayed her own babes to punish Jason. I made you watch me kill him."

"You would never hurt Adam." Will's certainty in him is comforting, as is the way he doesn't even twitch as Hannibal tells him he dreamed of fatally wounding a six year old. "Adam is perfectly okay. He's probably getting ready to come get us up."

As if summoned by Will's words, there's the soft creak of a door opening, accompanied by the sound of feet on hardwood. Grinning, Will mouths, *"Three… two… one…"*

A thump as a small body hits the mattress, landing hard on Hannibal's legs and making him groan even as he laughs.

"Papa! Daddy! Wake up, wake up, it's morning!"

phone call

Kicking off his shoes, Will flops across the hotel double bed, phone already ringing and pressed to his ear. Hannibal picks up halfway through the second ring.

“Hello, my darling,” Even through the phone speaker, his voice is rich and low, and it flows through Will like a gulp of coffee, waking him up and invigorating him. The day has been so long -- Another day, another case, another time he must force himself to look, to understand, and feel all the terrible things that happen in the minds of killers. All that had kept his spirits up was the anticipation of this phone call.

“Hey, you,” he replies, and it’s much less charming and romantic than Hannibal’s greeting, but he hopes his affection carries through all the same. “How are you holding up?”

“I feel like I ought to be the one asking you that.”

Will hums in response, raising his arm not occupied with his phone to tuck it under his head like a makeshift pillow. “Nah, I’m just doing my same old job. You’re the one learning to wrangle a five year old."

“Wrangle?” Hannibal’s laugh still sends a shiver up Will’s spine when he hears it, a jolt of warmth that spreads from his toes to the top of his head. How lucky he always feels to hear that laugh, to be the cause of it. “You make it sound like I’m running after him with a lasso, Will.”

It’s Will’s turn to laugh, imagining Hannibal in jeans and a cowboy hat, chasing the flighty escaped colt that is Will’s kindergartener in a bad mood. Before he can answer, however, his thoughts are interrupted by the sound, albeit slightly muffled by distance from the phone, of his son’s voice.

“You said Will. Is that Daddy?”

Will can almost feel some little knot of tension deep inside he hadn’t been aware of come loose. It’s not his first time spending the night away from Adam, of course, but the audible proof that his son is still alive and well, even out of his sight, is reassuring. He’d never doubted that, of course, but hearing his voice is still a small relief. It’s the first time Will has been out of town since he and Hannibal started dating, the first time that Hannibal has offered to stay at Will’s house to look after Adam and the dogs while he’s away. He hopes they’re doing as well as Hannibal’s cheerful dismissal made it sound.

“Give him the phone,” He murmurs, “We have a routine of calling every night when I’m away, and if he thinks I’m on the phone and you aren’t letting him talk to me, you’ll be on his shit list. We can talk more once he gets bored or goes to bed.”

“As you wish,” Hannibal responds, and Will bites back the urge to ask if he’s seen The Princess Bride, because depending on the answer, he’d either laugh himself silly at

Hannibal's unintentional reference, or find himself completely at a loss for words. *Buttercup realized that when he said "As you wish", what he really meant was "I love you."*

"Daddy?"

"Hi," Will breathes, unable to help the wide smile that crosses his face despite its cause not being present to see it. If Hannibal's voice is coffee, then Adam's is hot chocolate, a warmth and sweetness that fills him with comfort and soothes his rubbed-raw nerves. "What are you up to, lamb?"

"Cooking."

"Are you?" Adam, as sweet and eager to help as he is, isn't exactly the most coordinated. It's more likely that he's in the way rather than actually doing anything helpful.

"Uh-huh. Hamble says I'm… Hamble, what am I doing?" Will can't quite make out Hannibal's reply, but Adam hums in response and then carefully repeats, "Supervising."

Will can't help but laugh.

"Well, that's a very important job. Gotta make sure Hamble isn't messing up your dinner, yeah?"

"Daddy," Adam says, in a disapproving tone that makes it clear he thinks Will has said something very, *very* stupid, "Hamble never messes up."

Will tries valiantly to suppress his amusement, and manages to get out a quick "Of course," before he's rolling and burying his face in a pillow to muffle his laughter.

"Daddy!" His boy is outraged on Hannibal's behalf, and picturing the affronted look on his face has Will shaking with the force of his mirth.

For a few moments, there is nothing on the other end of the phone but silence. Then, suddenly, a bemused "Will?"

"Oh my God," Will gasps, "Fuck, I haven't laughed that hard in a while."

"What was that about?"

Will rubs a hand over his face, trying to settle his heartbeat back into a normal range. "I had the audacity to suggest Adam supervising you cooking was to be sure you didn't mess up. He wasn't pleased with me assuming you *could* mess up."

"Ah," replies Hannibal, "That explains why he simply put the phone down and walked away."

That brings on another burst of laughter, leaving Will teary-eyed and beaming as he holds a hand to his side. "I think you might've replaced me as his favorite person, babe. He was ready to duel me for your honor."

“I count myself very fortunate to have such a stalwart champion.”

“Even if he’s knee-height and a hundred pounds soaking wet?”

“Indeed.”

In the background, Will hears a clatter, and the sound of one of the dogs whining, followed by Adam crying, “Oops!”

Hannibal’s voice is dry and flat as he murmurs, “Oh dear.”

Will decides that being sore from laughing is his idea of what happiness feels like.

mean words

Chapter Notes

> TW FOR THIS CHAPTER: Use of ableist and homophobic language. Specifically the r slur and the f slur. In context, Adam is repeating the words of another child without knowing what they mean, but the words themselves do appear in-text, so be mindful of what might trigger you.

"Dads," Adam says one day when he's working on his homework, sprawled across the living room rug, "What does retard mean?"

Will feels like his blood has turned to ice. It's an innocent question, he knows, but just hearing that word from his son's mouth makes him sick to his stomach. That word had been flung at him in most of the schools he could remember attending, at least until he was old enough to properly mask his empathy and his oddities, learned to keep his head down and stay out of the way. Will had never received a formal diagnosis of autism, but having researched on his own after Adam *had* , he'd begun to recognize signs in himself, to find names for behaviors that he'd always thought of as simply "weird."

That word made him feel awful at just the memory of it. How much worse would it become for Adam, once he understood it, and he was already aware that he was different, that his brain didn't work like other kids' did?

Will meets Hannibal's eyes, and whatever Hannibal sees there must strike him, because puts the book he'd been reading aside and says, "Come here, *mažylis* ."

Obediently, Adam clambers up onto the couch to join his fathers' casual mishmash of limbs — Hannibal on one end of the couch, Will on the other, with his legs flung along the length of the couch to rest his feet in Hannibal's lap. Will drops the papers he had been grading onto an end-table to focus on the Serious Conversation he's sure is coming.

"Where did you hear that word?" Hannibal asks as Adam curls against Hannibal's side, tucking himself under Will's extended legs.

Adam gnaws his bottom lip, his eyes flicking to Will, who musters up a weak attempt at a reassuring smile. "You aren't in trouble for saying it, lamb," he promises, "We just want to know where you learned it so we can talk about it."

"At school," Adam mumbles, "Eddie said the other kids don't like me 'cause I'm a retard."

Will closes his eyes and forces himself to swallow down his rage before he replies, "Eddie Lane is a mean little jerk, and you shouldn't listen to anything that comes out of his mouth."

Who the fuck was Eddie Lane, to think he could speak to Will's son like that? To anyone, really? They'd heard of Eddie before, in Adam's tales from school, and they'd advised him as best they could, but Will was starting to seriously consider getting involved in the situation. Especially now, with the little asshole aiming that gut-churning word at his son.

Adam looks up at him, wide blue eyes so innocent and trusting, and it makes Will ache like a fist to the chest thinking that anyone, even a fellow ten year old, could ever be cruel to him. "But what's it mean, Daddy?"

"Well," says Hannibal, slow and steady and much calmer than Will feels, "It's derived from the Italian *ritardando* . It's a musical annotation, referring to a gradual decrease in playing speed." As he speaks, he combs his fingers gently through Adam's curls, and the way Adam tilts his head into the touch with a little sigh settles something deep in Will, smooths his ruffled feathers. His child's obvious contentment a balm to his agitated nerves. "Originally, it was used as a medical diagnosis to apply to people doctors at the time viewed as developmentally delayed — Slower than the rest, hence the adoption of the term, you see."

"I see," Adam replies, "Eddie thinks I'm… delayed?"

"Do you remember, Adam, what I told you about NTs?"

"My brain works differently than NTs," Adam recites, familiar and comfortable with the words through Hannibal's patient repetition of the concept, "It's not bad, just not the same as most people's."

"Yes, exactly," Hannibal responds with praise, as he always does when Adam demonstrates understanding of the things Hannibal tries to teach him, "What a clever boy you are. Unfortunately, some people, like Eddie Lane, aren't quite as clever as you, and they don't understand that the differences between NTs and NDs like you aren't bad. Some of those people think that being NT makes them better than ND people, and that NDs aren't as smart as NTs."

Adam's brow furrows, confusion settling on his little features. "But I'm smart. I know lots of things about space. And Daddy's the smartest person in the whole world."

Will stared at him. He'd never discussed the way his mind worked, aside from the bare minimum of his hyperempathy being a fact of life, with anyone but Hannibal. Never discussed his personal suspicions about his own possible autism with anybody at all. He knew his empathy disorder counted as neurodivergence, but he had never discussed that with Adam.

"You and your daddy are both very smart," Hannibal assures him without hesitation, "It's just that a lot of NTs have been taught to believe that NDs aren't capable of being smart. The word retard, as Eddie used it, is an insult. It means that he thinks your being ND makes you unintelligent and abnormal. It isn't the truth, of course, but it's a word that's meant to be hurtful, not truthful."

Adam hums in thought. "It's a mean word?"

“Yes,” Will suddenly finds his voice, “It’s a very mean word, one you should never, ever use for someone. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, Daddy,” Adam nods, solemn. Over the top of his head, Hannibal and Will lock eyes and come to a silent agreement. Letting Adam try to fight his own little elementary school battles is all well and good, but in situations like this, he might need his fathers to raise a certain amount of hell in his defense.

Adam climbs into the car the next day when Will picks him up and rubs at his eyes in a way he probably thinks is subtle. Will mentally bumps the amount of hell he and Hannibal are going to raise with the school up a notch.

“Everything okay, buddy?”

Adam sniffles, blinks up at him with too-shiny eyes, and says “At home.”

Once they get home, Adam kicks his shoes off by the door and heads right for the stairs. With a sigh, Will follows. He finds Adam snuggling into his covers, clutching his stuffed sheep to his chest.

“Adam,” Will says softly. His son glances up and then looks away, burrowing under the blankets. “Hey,” Will coaxes, “What’s goin’ on, huh?”

Adam peers up at him, and Will’s heart aches as he slowly sits on the edge of his bed.

“Did Eddie say something?”

“Uh-huh,” Adam mumbles, scooting out of his blanket cocoon, just a little, and laying his head on Will’s thigh.

“What was it today?”

“I tried to tell him what Papa said about NTs and NDs, but he wouldn’t listen.” Adam looks up at him, eyes bright with tears. “He said he didn’t have to listen to what I say ‘cause I’m just a… just a retard with faggot dads.”

Will clenches his fists and dials his internal “Amount of Hell to raise at that goddamn school” meter up to eleven.

“Don’t you pay attention to a single thing Eddie says, okay? He’s a rotten brat who needs to be taught better, and if your dads have their way, he’s gonna be in big trouble.”

Adam hums in response, curling up against Will’s leg. “Faggot is another mean word?”

“Yeah, baby. I’ll tell you more some other time.”

Adam climbs into his lap, laying his head on Will’s shoulder. “Eddie knows lots of mean words.”

Will kisses the top of his head. “Papa and I are gonna talk to your school about that.”

The principal tries to pull the “bullying is a normal part of growing up” line. Hannibal brings up the kind of media attention lawsuits over ableism and homophobia would bring to their school. A no-tolerance policy is instituted and Eddie Lane never so much as speaks to Adam again.

piano lesson

Will is sprawled across the couch in Hannibal's study, half-asleep, when his attention is caught by Hannibal's voice — His boyfriend? His lover? His partner? He doesn't know a word that can properly contain everything Hannibal means to him.

"Now, you see," He says, hushed but with that particular softness that Will knows is reserved for Will himself and his son, "Your hands are still a little small to begin properly playing most pieces. That must wait until you do a bit of growing. Do you think you can be patient?"

"Yes, Hamble," Adam replies, solemn as if he's swearing on a Bible.

Will opens his eyes to see Hannibal seated at his piano, Adam perched in his lap. Hannibal is holding Adam's hands, still baby-chubby and tiny, in his own larger, stronger ones, as they face the piano keys. "Very good." Hannibal nods, "However, that doesn't mean that you can't begin to learn and practice things like scales."

Adam peers up at him, befuddled. "Like on fish?"

Hannibal's chuckle is low and rumbling, and Will sinks into the sound of it, like the sensation of settling in front of a cozy fire on a cold night. "No, not like on fish, I'm afraid. In music, a scale is a set of musical notes ordered by fundamental frequency or pitch."

Adam says nothing, only stares up at him, and Will bites back the urge to laugh, not wanting to ruin their quiet moment of bonding.

Hannibal sighs. "A musical scale is a set of notes that go together because they sound right together. Like *do, re, mi.* "

"Oh!" Adam perks up at that, "I've seen that movie."

"As good a starting point as any. Here." Hannibal reaches out, laying Adam's hands on the keys and covering them with his own. "See? The keys your fingers are on now make up the major C scale. This is how my aunt taught me, when I was a boy."

Then he is manipulating Adam's hands to press the keys and the awed delight in Adam's face as the notes ring out under his fingers is something Will does his best to take a mental snapshot of.

As they play the notes, Hannibal counts aloud in a soft, almost-musical lilt. *"Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf."*

And, as they repeat the scale, Adam blithely echoes him. *"Un, deux, trois, quatre, cinq, six, sept, huit, neuf."*

unexpected visits

“Where were you last night, Hannibal?”

The man in question turns a disgruntled look on Jack. With his red sweater and pajama pants, sandy hair loose and flopping forward, he’s the very picture of early morning befuddlement.

“I was here, of course. Where else would I be?” He replies, like Jack’s question is utterly ridiculous. Which, of course, it would be if he wasn’t under suspicion of being a serial killer.

Jack sighs. Of course it wouldn’t be that simple. What did he expect, for Hannibal to tell him, “ *Oh, I just popped out to do a murder*”? Still, with no way to confirm his alibi, that would be reason enough to continue prodding around. “I don’t suppose there’s anyone here who could corroborate that?”

“Papa?”

Both heads turn at the sound of a sleepy little voice, and Jack is startled to recognize Adam Graham. Will’s son, at Hannibal’s house, this early in the morning? Calling Hannibal “*Papa*”? Jack wants to curse for how complicated this has suddenly become.

As Jack stares, the boy makes his way over to them, a stuffed lamb dangling by one limb from his hand.

Hannibal smiles down at him, a hand reaching out to comb gently through his sleep-tousled curls. “It’s alright, *mažylis*,” he reassures softly, “I was just speaking to Uncle Jack here. Go back to bed, it’s nothing for you to worry about.”

Adam frowns, little fingers curling around the hem of Hannibal’s sweater. “It’s too early for visiting,” he says, as if the two of them might be somehow confused, “It’s not even breffast time.” He turns his head to fix Jack with a look that somehow manages to be a perfect miniature replica of the glare Will makes when something at work pisses him off. It would be kind of cute if it wasn’t irritating.

And then there’s the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and a familiar voice calls, “Darlin’? What are y-- *oh*.”

Oh, indeed. Because standing in the doorway to the room, in nothing but a shirt that’s obviously too large to be his own -- and, *thank Christ*, falls all the way to his thighs -- is Will Graham, sleep-muddled and flushed and obviously having spent the night.

“Good morning, love,” Hannibal says calmly, as if it’s a common occurrence to have the head of the BSU, a disgruntled five year old, and a half-naked Will Graham all in his living room before eight in the morning.

Without even looking at Jack, Will crosses the room to press a kiss against Hannibal's cheek, lifting his son to balance on his hip. Adam releases his grip on Hannibal's sweater without complaint, but as he lays his head on Will's shoulder, he continues to glower adorably at Jack.

"What's Jack doin' here?"

Jack opens his mouth to protest that he is, in fact, right in front of them and doesn't appreciate being spoken about like he isn't, but before he can form the words, a memory flashes through his mind. *Maybe we shouldn't push him like that, Doctor,* and the door to his office slamming roughly closed as Will leaves. Jack closes his mouth.

Hannibal's hand rests on the small of Will's back, casual and intimate and possessive. The three of them, together, look strikingly domestic. Jack feels, suddenly, as if he is intruding -- More so than he already is by arriving on the doorstep this early. Like he's intruding on a family's private time.

"Jack was just enquiring as to my whereabouts last night," Hannibal replies, cool as a cucumber, and just like that, Jack is the subject of *two* glares from Grahams at once.

"He was here. I was with Hannibal all night, Jack." Will actually meets his eyes for once, bold and defiant, silently daring Jack to push and question further.

"It was just a simple matter of ensuring we knew where all our consultants were, Will," Jack says, trying to placate.

"Nothing's ever simple with you," Will snaps, and Hannibal lowers his hand, wraps his arm around Will's waist and pulls him into his side. It's a shockingly familiar gesture, and it takes Jack a moment to process the implications of them both being comfortable enough to do such a thing in front of him. And with Will's son addressing Hannibal as his papa…

This whole thing, whatever it is, has been going on for a while. And Will has no idea about Jack's suspicions.

This is going to be a *problem*.

lost and found

Will takes one look at the case file for the Turner family murder and says “Don’t make me do this.”

“Will—“

“Please,” Will says, and that makes everyone pause. “Jack. Don’t take me away from my son, right before the holidays, to make me step into the head of someone who kills children.”

The rest of the team exchange looks, stung with guilt by Will’s summation of the circumstances. Jack, however, glowers. “You’d rather sit at home sipping cocoa while some maniac goes around killing other people’s kids?”

“Frankly,” Will snaps, “Yes. I would rather be at home with my son than doing most things, but I know when I need to be responsible. And you aren’t going to let me off the hook on this one, so I might as well quit wiggling, right?”

So Will sits at the Turners’ dining table, lets the pendulum swing, and sinks into the mindset of whoever was willing to murder them. Even the little ones behave. Even the little ones die.

“What do you see, Will?” Jack demands.

Will opens his eyes. Swallows. “Family values.”

“Whose family values?”

Will picks up a framed photo, blood spatter drying against the glass. Karen Turner and Jesse, the missing middle child. She’s pressing a kiss to his forehead as he laughs in her arms. A charming moment, frozen in time. He wonders how often Mrs. Turner has looked at this exact photo in the past year, arms aching with the urge to hold her son rather than a picture, a yearning she can’t fulfill. Just then, Will doesn’t need his hyperempathy to know exactly how that feels.

“Let me guess,” Zeller shoots in his direction, “Only child.”

Will raises a brow. “Why do you say that?”

“‘Cause family friction’s usually a catalyst for personality development.”

Will *is* an only child. Will’s son is an only child. And therein lies the elephant in the room. Will’s son. While the others -- Even Jack, to an extent, much to Will’s surprise -- banter and quip about their siblings and their respective places within their family dynamics, they’re all carefully dancing around one rather important factor: Will is a father.

He tunes back into the conversation just in time to hear Zeller smugly say, “Middle’s the sweet spot.” Will almost snorts. Bites back the impulse to point out that Jesse Turner was the middle child.

Instead, he quips, “Always trying to figure out where they fit in.” Zeller turns to look at him, his smile fading. “They can be great politicians,” Will adds, moving to stand at Jack’s side, “Or lousy ones.”

Jack hands him a crime scene photo of Karen Turner. “All the victims have defensive wounds except for Mrs. Turner.” Will looks at the steady, almost-serene expression on the dead woman’s face. How she turned towards her killer.

“There’s forgiveness.”

Jack scowls. “What kind of victim forgives their killer at the moment of death?”

Will looks towards the body on one of the tables. Thinks of the angle of the killing shot. Probably crouching, Zeller had said. Crouching or simply shorter than the target. A voice in his head that sounds oddly like Hannibal murmurs, *Is there anything that you would not forgive Adam for?*

“A parent.”

“There always seemed something so foreign about family. I never connected to the concept.” Will’s gaze is far away, staring into the distance without actually focusing on anything, and though he’s clearly trying to sound blasé and casual, there’s something melancholy in his voice.

“Until Adam,” Hannibal supplies, because no one who has ever seen Will Graham with his son could ever believe that the man isn’t utterly devoted to him.

“Until Adam,” Will agrees with a nod. “Adam was… a plot twist. I’d been perfectly happy with my little family of strays until he came along. I guess I didn’t… realize that I’d been missing something like him until he was there.”

“You said you had no relationship with his mother. How did she find you, in order to leave Adam with you?”

Will shrugs. “Hell if I know. Don’t think I would’ve given her my address when it was a drunken hook-up, so I guess she must have… looked me up. Either when she figured out she was pregnant or when Adam was born.”

Hannibal lets that hang in the air for a moment before continuing. “Tell me about the Turner family. Were they affluent? Well-to-do?”

“Well, they lived like they had money.”

“Did your family have money, Will?”

“We were poor.” The answer is immediate, almost defensive. “I followed my father from the boatyards of... Biloxi and Greenville to, uh, lake boats on Erie.”

“Always the new boy at school,” Hannibal hums, “Always the stranger.”

A wry smile twists Will’s lips. “Always.”

“What grudge was Mrs. Turner’s killer harboring against her?”

Will tilts his head in thought. “Motherhood.”

“Not motherhood. A perversion of it.”

“Whatever this killer thinks motherhood… parenthood… means.” Will amends slowly.

“As opposed to what it truly is?”

“Whoever this killer is, they relish the idea of having children dependent on them because it makes them feel powerful. They think that being a parent is… about them.”

“A twisted, self-centered concept of parenthood.” Hannibal offers.

“Nothing in my life has really been about me since the moment I opened the door and found Adam on my porch.”

After a long day arguing with Jack about increasingly illogical theories, particularly about the behavior of the missing children Will had surmised were involved with the deaths of their families, and their relationships to the relatives they’d killed, Will finally snaps.

“Do you have children, Jack?”

He knows the answer already, and Jack knows he knows, but Will, for once, holds his gaze. Refuses to back down.

“No. I don’t.”

“Then why would you presume that you know how a parent’s mind works better than I would? In case you’ve forgotten, I’m the only person in this room who *is* a parent. I left my son staying with a friend, days before Christmas, to help you solve this case, and you aren’t even listening to me.”

No one questions him after that.

“Has Christmas come early? Or late?”

“Forget it,” Will mumbles, stalking away from Hannibal and the bag tossed onto the chaise, “I was upset when I bought it.” A thoughtful pause. “Maybe still am.”

“What is it?” Hannibal asks, picking up the cream-colored package and turning it in his hands.

“Fly-tying gear. For Abigail.”

Hannibal hums. “Her father taught her to hunt. You would teach her to fish.”

“That’s why I thought better of it,” Will replies.

“It’s natural for you to feel responsible for her, Will. You saved her life. In the same moment, you orphaned her. Comes with a certain amount of obligation.”

Will is standing at Hannibal’s desk, back to him, fiddling with Hannibal’s things. Hannibal prods.

“Paternal instincts kicking up a fuss, Will?”

Will turns around and fixes him with a sharp look. “Don’t *you* feel responsible for her?”

“Yes. I feel a remarkable amount of obligation.”

Will sighs, raking a hand roughly through his hair. “I couldn’t stand the thought of her having nobody for the holidays.”

“C.J. Lincoln isn’t the ringleader,” Will explains, “There’s an adult with some formative sway. It’s a woman -- A mother figure, I think. She’s looking to form a family.”

“Family can have a contagion effect on some people,” Jack notes, “Influences them to adopt similar behaviors and attitudes.”

Will sighs. “Whoever this woman is, she wants these children to *burst* with love for her. But she has to erase their families to do that.”

“So she abducts them, convinces them no one else could love them as much as she does, and then makes damn sure of it.”

“By killing their families, and especially the mothers, she is… eliminating any potential rivals for the affection of the children she’s kidnapped. She wants not just their love but their worship. She wants to be the center of their universe.”

Hannibal has just gotten Abigail settled in the kitchen armchair again when there’s a knock at the door. “Wait here,” He instructs her, and she nods placidly.

When he opens the door, Will is there, with Adam in tow. “Didn’t exactly have time to find a sitter on such short notice,” Will explains, apologetic.

“Nonsense,” Hannibal replies, “I said my kitchen is always open to friends, and that includes Adam.”

“Hi, Hamble,” chirps the child in question, and Hannibal can’t help but smile. The childish mispronunciation is oddly endearing, reminding him a bit of Mischa, who had never quite been able to say his name correctly.

“Hello, Adam,” He replies, and ushers them both inside. “Just so you know, Will, Abigail is here.”

Will stops dead in his tracks. “Abigail’s here?”

“That’s what I said, yes.”

“She’s supposed to be at Port Haven.”

Hannibal nods. “I thought it might do her good to step out of that environment for a bit, somewhere closer to the real world but still safe.”

“You *thought?*” There is a fierceness in Will’s gaze that Hannibal secretly thrills at. Oh yes, Will could be glorious if Hannibal could coax him into accepting his darker urges.

“She had a panic attack and I gave her a mild sedative to settle her.”

“*You gave her drugs?*” Will hisses.

Hannibal does his best to look chastised. “Only half a Valium, Will, but she may be a little hazy.”

Will mumbles something Hannibal doesn’t catch, and leads the way to the kitchen.

“Will!” Abigail says brightly when they enter, happier to see Will than she’s ever been when fully aware, “And… a tiny Will.”

“Hey, Abigail,” Will says softly, “This is my son, Adam.” He gently nudges his son, who had hidden himself behind Will’s legs at the sight of a stranger. “Adam, lamb, can you say hi to Abigail? She’s a friend of ours.”

Adam peeks around his father’s legs, and mumbles “Hi, Ab-gail.”

“Hi,” Abigail actually gets up out of her chair and kneels on the floor. “You can call me Abby if you want. Probably easier for you, yeah?”

“Yeah.” Apparently made curious by Abigail lowering herself to his level, Adam slowly inches out from behind Will and approaches her.

“Do you live with Hamble?” Adam asks, and Abigail shakes her head with a little giggle.

“No, I’m just visiting. Hannibal made breakfast for dinner.”

"Breffast!" Adam squeaks, thrilled.

Hannibal glances at Will and finds the other man's gaze fixed firmly on the two children acquainting themselves with each other on Hannibal's kitchen floor. Abigail looks up at them, eyes huge and shiny with the effects of the psilocybin, and goes suddenly still, her eyes filling with tears.

"Abigail?" Will asks, alarmed, and crouches down to her level, just as Abigail herself did for Adam. Hannibal steps behind him, places a hand between the other man's shoulderblades to steady him.

"What do you see, Abigail?"

Abigail smiles, wide and tearful and hazy. "Family."

"Chris, wait!"

Christopher O'Halloran, twelve years old, and returned to his family to kill them, spins around and points a handgun at him. Will doesn't so much as think of reaching for his own, even for a second. "Don't shoot," He blurts as quickly as he can, not sure if he's speaking to the boy in front of him or the armed agent behind him, "It's okay." He lifts his hands up so Christopher can see them. Empty. Nonthreatening. "Put the gun down, Christopher. You're home now."

A woman emerges from the pool shed behind Christopher. *Wendy,* some distant, detached part of Will's brain giggles, the danger throwing everything into stark, Technicolor relief, *Wendy and the Lost Boys*.

The woman strokes Christopher's hair with one hand and wraps the other arm around his shoulder, pressing her gun into the child's chest. A shield made of a little boy. Will wants to vomit.

"Shoot him, Christopher," she hisses. The boy's hands are trembling.

Slowly, Will lowers himself to his knees, making himself visibly less of a threat. "Christopher," he whispers, "Please." He watches the barrel of the gun bob slightly with Christopher's shaking. He thinks of Adam. Hopes that, if this goes wrong, he'll at least be taken care of.

A gunshot.

Before he can even process what has happened, Will is lurching to his feet and darting forward. The kidnapper is on the ground, bloody. Beverly and a few other agents are charging towards the shed. He reaches Christopher as he drops his gun and twists to look behind him at his false mother, gently seizes the boy by the shoulders, and pulls him close to block his view. "Don't look, okay? Just don't look."

"I'm sorry," he whimpers, voice muffled where his face is pressed against Will's shirt.

"I know."

Will guides him away, sits him in the quiet of an FBI van. Slides into the backseat beside him, and doesn't comment when the boy grabs his hand and won't let go.

"Can I go home now?" He asks, voice rough with emotion.

"I don't think we can let you go home yet, buddy. You came here to kill your family. That's all anybody knows right now. It might be all that anybody ever believes."

"I wasn't gonna do it," Christopher mumbles, staring down at their joined hands.

"Well," Will sighs, "You're gonna have to talk to a lot of people about it. And those people are gonna try to help you understand what it was you were trying to do."

"She told me… that they weren't my family. That we had to make our own family." He looks up then, meeting Will's eyes. "Do you have a family?"

The thought of Adam makes Will smile, even in this situation, just a little. "I have a son. He's five."

"So you know what it's like," Christopher says simply, and Will nods. "Can I talk to my mom?" He hesitates, just for a moment, and then clarifies, "My real mom."

"In a little while," Will assures him, "But first, I need you to talk to me."

There are tear tracks shining on the kid's cheeks. "I just want my mom."

When Will gets home, he pays and thanks his babysitter -- A stubborn but soft-spoken teenager who lives nearby with relatives and calls him *Mister Graham* in a thick West Virginia drawl -- before going in search of his son.

He finds Adam curled up in front of the space-heater that occupies the fireplace, surrounded by the dogs, who happily share their warmth with their two-legged brother. Adam whines softly in his sleep when Will lifts him, and Will kisses the top of his head in silent apology before deciding that, after everything, he needs Adam close tonight.

So he tucks Adam into his bed and curls around him, content.

intimacy

Buster, barking frantically, darts out into the snow. Faster than Will can grab him, Adam, clad only in his pajamas and slippers, chases after him.

Anything Will has ever felt before that he might previously have dubbed fear suddenly pales in comparison to this moment. His heart has climbed out of his body and raced away. "Adam!" He shouts, but by the time he fumbles his shoes and coat on and grabs his rifle, he's lost sight of both boy and dog.

He charges out towards the woods, heart pounding so loudly that he almost can't hear Buster's barking, following the footprints in the snow. "Adam? Adam!"

From somewhere up ahead, Adam calls, "Daddy?"

There's a horrible, inhuman sound, Buster yowls in pain, and Adam screams. Will runs, hardly registering anything but the bone-deep need to protect his child and breathtaking terror. He finds his runaways huddled against a tree, the snow around them being slowly peppered with drops of scarlet. There is blood already matting in Buster's fur, and the left sleeve of Adam's favorite spacesuit pajamas is torn, blood slowly starting to flow from the gash in his arm.

Choking back his panic and fear, Will drops to his knees beside them, peeling his coat off, wrapping it around Adam, and placing Buster in the boy's lap as gently as he can. "Hey, sweetheart," He says, as calmly as he can possibly fake, "Do you think you can hold onto Buster for me?" Obediently, Adam tightens his arms around the little terrier to hold him to his chest. That will put pressure on Buster's wound while Will can do the same to Adam's. "Yeah, just like that. Just like that. Good boy."

Adam stares up at him, trembling, with huge, tear-filled eyes, but doesn't cry. Too confused and shocked, Will realizes, to truly register the fear or the pain enough to cry. At the moment, he's willing to count that as a positive.

Just as he bends to pick his son up, there's another awful noise. Snatching his rifle up from the snow, Will whirls to face it.

"He came to my house, Hannibal," Will hisses, and despite the circumstances, barely-contained rage looks absolutely lovely on him. He is incandescent with righteous, protective fury, and Hannibal longs to fall to his knees and worship. "Where our son sleeps. You told me Tier was past his delusions, but he *hurt Adam* ."

And Hannibal's dreamy thoughts of Will's beauty and Becoming turn to ash. He had assumed that the blood he could smell came only from the split knuckles he'd spotted on Will, but…

In moments, he's at Will's side, peeling back the cocoon of coat and blankets that conceals their son. Cradled to Will's chest, head on his shoulder, Adam blinks up at Hannibal with wide, hazy eyes, and promptly bursts into tears.

"Oh, *piccolo* ," Hannibal sighs, and he thinks, just for a moment, how helpless his own parents must have felt seeing Mischa and Hannibal cry in fear on that horrible last day of their lives.

In his mind, his father falls like a puppet with his strings cut. His mother tries to shield himself and his sister with her own body, and lands close enough to the fireplace that her dress catches the flames. Mischa screams and reaches back for him as the men drag her from his arms. Will lies in Tobias Budge's string shop, throat sliced to bloody ribbons by steel wire. Adam sprawls in the snow, a broken ragdoll, the gash in his arm slowly staining the pristine whiteness around him with red.

"Come here, my darlings," Hannibal leads them to his master bathroom. Will sits on a stool as Hannibal looks over Adam's wound. The injury is deep and angry-looking, and he clicks his tongue in resignation. Grabbing a first aid kit from under the sink, he pulls out a jar of numbing cream and applies some to the skin around the wound.

"What's that?" Will asks, holding Adam, still whimpering, against him.

"A cream to numb the skin," Hannibal answers, pulling a tiny spool of medical thread and a plastic packet with a sterilized needle in it out of the kit. "I need to close the wound."

Will's eyes widen slightly in realization at the sight. Easily, he turns Adam in his lap, his face pressed into Will's chest and thus unable to see anything Hannibal does. Hannibal smiles a little, approving.

"You might feel a little pressure on your arm, dear one," Hannibal says softly, "But it shouldn't hurt, alright?"

Adam is still sniffling, but he says "Okay, Papa," without hesitation.

With an ease that came from years of practice, Hannibal stitches up the injury as quickly and neatly as possible. Even as he does it, Adam dozes off in Will's lap, obviously exhausted by the stress and fear of the evening. Over his head, Hannibal and Will share a small, fond smile. "Give him here," Hannibal says when he finishes, lifting the sleeping boy from Will's arms and laying him down on Hannibal's own bed.

Then he returns to Will, kneels before him and kisses his bloody knuckles.

"Did you kill him with your hands?"

Will looks down at his own hands, held in Hannibal's, looks at the small, bright smear of blood Hannibal can feel on his lip where it met the broken skin. "It was…" he hesitates, slowly flexes his dominant hand. "Intimate."

“It deserves intimacy,” Hannibal replies, his chest warmed by pride, “You were Randall Tier’s final enemy.”

“He hurt my child,” Will says, and that righteous fire is back in his eyes, thrilling Hannibal to the core. “I had to defend Adam.”

“And you did so fiercely and admirably, my love,” Hannibal murmurs, fetching a bowl to fill it with warm water and Epsom salts.

As Hannibal washes his battered hands, Will sits quietly, staring at something in the distance that only he can see. As he lifts Will’s hand from the water and gently dries and wraps it, Hannibal says coaxingly, “Don’t go inside, Will. You’ll want to retreat. You’ll want it, as the glint of the rail tempts us when we hear the approaching train. Stay with me.”

Finally, Will looks at him again, ocean eyes dark and stormy. “Where else would I go?”

“Whenever I mention going back home to Adam, he panics.”

“So don’t go back.”

Will freezes, one hand still wrapped around the carrot he’s meant to be chopping. “What?”

Hannibal’s arms, strong and warm, encircle him from behind. “Stay here. Bring your dogs and whatever of yours and Adam’s things you want to keep, and stay here.”

Will slowly puts the knife in his other hand down. “Permanently?”

Hannibal’s chin rests on his shoulder, a grounding, comforting weight, and his breath is warm against Will’s ear. “ *Come live with me, and be my love; and we will all the pleasures prove, that hills and valleys, dales and fields, woods, or steepy mountain yields.* ”

Will laughs softly, because of course Hannibal would quote one of the most famous poems of all time as an invitation to move in together. “You know there’s like a dozen responses to that poem where the lady tells the shepherd to fuck off?”

“Is it so terrible a thought, living with me?”

“Not so much terrible as impractical,” Will replies, still looking down at the still-unchopped carrot, “I have seven dogs and a five year old child, neither of which seem like they would coexist well with your decor.”

“Furnishings and belongings can be replaced and stored. You and Adam are singular and inimitable. I would put your comfort and his before all else.”

Will sighs, letting his body go lax and lean against Hannibal’s sturdy warmth. “I’ll think about it. Is that enough?”

“Anything,” Hannibal murmurs, “that you are willing to give me is enough.”

the talk

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Daddy?" Adam asks one day when Will picks him up from school, "How did I get made?"

Oh fuck, Will thinks. He wasn't ready for this. Adam was only ten, Will expected to have at least a couple more years before they had to give Adam The Talk. At least Adam had asked Will, rather than Hannibal. Knowing him, he would probably bust out the biology textbooks.

"Um," Will replies very eloquently, "Well… why don't you tell me how you think these things happen and we can go from there?"

Adam frowns at him, as if he's being a pain on purpose. "I don't know, Daddy," He says, in the tone of one explaining something very simple to a small child, "That's why I asked you. Do you not know either?"

"I know how it happens!" Will squawks, bemused by the suggestion that he, a grown man, might not know how reproduction works. Suggested by the living proof that he understands the process. "I just don't know how much I should be telling *you* ."

Adam huffs, crossing his arms. "Mrs. Harvey said that it takes a mom and a dad to make a baby. But I have two dads, so how did I get made?"

Will sighs. This is going to be a long talk.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry that this update took so long and is so short, but working as a substitute during a substitute shortage has really been wiping my energy out, and this is what I've been able to crank out. I'm trying to do better, but I'll give you what I can.

Mrs Harvey from 4th grade science, I'm so sorry to have dragged you into the lives of the Graham-Lecters.

little

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Hello, baby," Adam says softly, stretching up on his tiptoes to peer down at the little bundle in Margot's arms.

"Her name is Mae," Margot reminds him gently, an indulgent smile on her face as she looks down at her baby.

"Hello, baby Mae. You are very little."

"You were that little once," Will informs him with a chuckle.

Adam shoots him a disdainful look, as if he can't believe how ridiculous his father is. "I was *not!"*

"You were," Will laughs, "When you were as young as Mae, you were."

Adam frowns, this information apparently unacceptable to him. "But I'm not *little*."

"Because you grew," Hannibal explains, fighting valiantly to hide his amusement. "When you were just born, like Mae is, you would have been close to her size. But you grew as you got older, just as Mae will."

"Oh." Adam considers this for a moment. "Can Mae play with my toys with me?"

Margot smiles. "She's a bit too young for that right now, but if you're patient until she gets a little bigger, I'm sure she'd love to."

"Okay." Adam nods. "She can be the alien baby."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the shortness and sporadic-ness. Life has been hard lately, and it's hard sometimes to find soft things in my brain. Please be patient with me.

lamb

Adam's hair, when it grows beyond the faint little wisps he was born with, grows thick and curly. It's charming, and Will finds himself combing his fingers through the baby's hair whenever he has the opportunity. It seems to soothe the both of them.

"You're like a curly little lamb, aren't you?" He asks one day when Adam is six months old and his hair has begun threatening to droop into his eyes. He'd never imagined himself as a person who would speak to a baby who can't speak back, but then again, he'd never imagined himself as a person who ever interacted with a baby at all. Talking to Adam was sometimes the only time he heard words rather than babbling and barking in a day.

A few weeks later, the baby sits in the bathroom sink as Will carefully trims Adam's hair himself, with an old pair of kitchen scissors. "My daddy did this for me when I was little," he informs his son, "He'd sit me in a chair in the kitchen, put a dishrag over my shoulders, and tell me if I squirmed, he'd chop the sticky-out bits of my ears right off. God, I hope you don't inherit my ears."

Adam babbles softly in response.

(He does, as a matter of fact, inherit Will's sticky-out ears).

After that, it becomes something like habit. He never consciously decides to make it a nickname, but it comes out anyway. It feels natural as breathing. He's Adam's dad and Adam is his lamb, and it's as simple as that.

"I want Daddy," Adam declares, bull-headed in the way only young children seemed to be.

Hannibal sighs, not accustomed to this kind of circular argument. Generally, the people he conversed with tended to be more reasonable. Reason was not a trait commonly associated with five year olds. And, unfortunately, Adam's father isn't available, still deep in a medication-induced sleep as the worst of his encephalitis is treated.

"I know you do," Hannibal replies, patient as he can be, "But your father isn't well, and he's still resting."

"But I want him." Adam frowns up at him, as if that is all that matters. In his mind, it is. Will is the only parent Adam has ever known, and he has always been there to soothe or comfort him the moment Adam wanted or needed his company. How confusing and distressing it must be to be told, for the first time in his life, really, that his father is unavailable to him. The one true constant in his life suddenly out of reach. So Hannibal isn't surprised, really, when Adam's bottom lip begins to quiver, and his big blue eyes start to fill with tears.

"Adam—-"

Before Hannibal can try to diffuse the situation, Adam lets out an ear-splitting wail. Hannibal swears mentally, scooping the boy up in an attempt to soothe him. Generally, physical contact has seemed to calm Adam down well in the past. It doesn't work now, of course. Adam kicks and swings his little fists, screaming again. If Will was not kept asleep by medication, the noise would have woken him by now, and he would be furious at Hannibal's obvious mishandling of the situation. Will would know what to do.

"Please stop," He says, raising his voice to be heard above Adam's screeching, "You're alright, Adam, you have no reason to be carrying on like this."

Adam continues to scream.

Hannibal has had little interaction with children since his own childhood.

People are staring.

Frantically, Hannibal casts his mind back, searching for something, anything, to make the noise stop and get Adam to settle. What calms little children? Think!

"Ein Mannlein steht im Walde ganz still und stum," He sings softly, bouncing the boy gently the way he'd seen Will do before, *"Es hat von lauter Purpur ein Mantlein um,"*

Adam's wailing trails off, apparently startled enough to be distracted from his outrage. Hannibal continues to sing his sister's favorite song, watching Will's son who was now his in a way hiccup and sniffle his way to calm. Once he's sure Adam has settled, Hannibal rubs his back soothingly and looks around for something to divert his attention.

"Look, *žvaigždė* ," He says softly, spotting an open archway leading to a room full of bright colors and trinkets, "Why don't we go and have a look, hmm?"

When they emerge, Adam is clutching a stuffed lamb to his chest and murmuring quietly to it. Hannibal doesn't mind. He would do much more than spend a little money to ensure Adam is content.

"Papa?" Adam asks later, "Is there a… a con-stell-ation that's a sheep?"

"There is," Hannibal replies, watching the boy stroke the plush wool, "It's called Aries."

"Aries," Adam echoes softly, pressing his lips to the top of the lamb's head.

the new kid

There's a new boy in Adam's class.

His name is Walter Call-Me-Wally, and he's moved here from somewhere far away. Florida, maybe, Adam thinks, but he can't remember for sure. Walter Call-Me-Wally is polite to everybody, and never talks back to the teachers or makes a fuss in class, which puts him miles above some of the other kids in Adam's opinion.

Adam sometimes feels a little bad for Walter Call-Me-Wally, because they are at an age where Papa says that most of the kids their age are starting to form themselves into little groups rather than simply all eating or playing together as they had before. Papa, when he'd explained it to Adam, had described it as children's first attempts to define themselves socially by peer association. Which boiled down to a lot of fancy grownup talk for his classmates more or less saying *This is who I am because this is who my friends are* .

Papa had said it was an entirely normal phase of development, and that Adam shouldn't let everyone's apparent unwillingness to include him in a group make him feel bad. Adam's classmates think he's weird, which Adam knew already, though it still stings a little to be reminded when everyone but him groups off. But the other kids don't seem to want Walter Call-Me-Wally in a group either.

"I find it very difficult to believe that this boy's surname is Call-Me-Wally," Papa says one night, when Adam is explaining this phenomenon.

"Oh, it's not," Adam says, "But any time someone says his name, Walter, he says *call me Wally* . So I never hear what his last name is. Nobody seems to want to sit with him or play with him, and I don't get it."

"He's the new kid," Daddy says with a shrug, "They don't want to include him 'cause he's a stranger."

"Oh," Adam spears a macaroni noodle on his fork. "I guess that makes sense."

One day, at recess, Adam spots Walter Call-Me-Wally at recess. He's alone, which isn't unusual, but there's something about him that catches Adam's attention. Walter Call-Me-Wally is watching some of the older boys play baseball in their gym class. Adam isn't very good at recognizing what feelings look like on other people, but he thinks that Walter Call-Me-Wally looks sad. That seems wrong. Nobody should be sad during recess. Adam looks around and realizes that nobody else seems to have noticed that Walter Call-Me-Wally is sad. Well then.

Adam had been in the middle of a very important game of Spaceship, but he parks his spaceship and wanders over to the bench Walter Call-Me-Wally is sitting on. "Hello."

Walter Call-Me-Wally glances at him and grunts.

“Are you sad?”

Walter Call-Me-Wally scowls at him.

Adam gnaws on his bottom lip, unsure. “It’s just that… you look sad. Nobody should be sad at recess.”

They sit in silence for a few moments, Walter Call-Me-Wally watching the baseball game and Adam watching him.

“My dad was a baseball player.” Walter Call-Me-Wally says finally, not looking at him. “He died when I was six. I miss him a lot.”

“Oh.” Adam doesn’t know what else to say. So he doesn’t say anything else. But for the rest of recess, he sits and watches baseball with Walter Call-Me-Wally.

The next day, Walter Call-Me-Wally sits down across from Adam at lunch. “Hey.”

Adam looks up from his food, curious. “What are you doing?”

“My moms say I need to try to make friends.”

Adam considers this for a moment. “My dads say the same thing.”

So they decide to be friends.

happy tears

Hannibal slides the ring onto his finger when Will nods, as Will's eyes welled up with tears. *"Mon cœur,"* Hannibal murmurs, & Will laughs faintly, letting the tears trickle down his cheeks. For a handful of moments, there is only silence, only the glistening soap-bubble of the two of them and the promise they were making.

And then, Adam emerges from behind a cluster of potted plants with an indignant squawk. "Papa!" He scolds, smacking harmlessly at Hannibal's leg, little face screwed up with his displeasure. "You made Daddy cry! You promised you wouldn't make him cry again!"

Will sniffles, wiping at his eyes with a watery chuckle at the protective outrage in his son's expression & the bewilderment on Hannibal's. "Were you here this whole time?"

Adam holds up a camera, hanging from his neck by a strap. "Papa said to be real quiet so I could take good pictures. But then he made you cry! He said this was a happy surprise, not a bad surprise, but you're crying!"

Will crouches down, taking one of Adam's hands in his. "It's okay, lamb, I promise. It was a good surprise. That's why I'm crying."

Adam purses his lips, obviously not convinced. "Crying is for sad or mad."

"Not always. Crying is just something that happens when we feel a lot, and sometimes those big feelings need a way to come out of us and they come out as tears."

Letting his camera dangle, Adam reaches up and wipes a stray tear from Will's cheek. "You're happy crying?"

"Yes." Turning his head to press a kiss to Adam's little palm, Will feels more than hears Hannibal crouch down beside him.

"Oh," Adam's hand leaves Will's cheek and Will knows without looking that it has migrated to Hannibal's. "Are you crying because you're happy too?"

"I am," murmurs Hannibal, and the slight rasp of emotion in his voice makes Will squeeze his eyes shut against a fresh wave of tears. "Sometimes our bodies simply cry because we feel so strongly. And I am incredibly happy, Adam. Do you understand?"

"I think so."

eighteen years and two weeks

Two weeks after Adam turns eighteen, he waves goodbye to his fathers, climbs into the car, and says, “I’ve never lied to my parents before.”

Nigel glances over at his boyfriend as he turns the key, and asks, “What are you lying about, gorgeous?”

He’s very glad, when Adam answers, that he hasn’t started driving yet, because if he had been, he probably would have crashed when Adam casually replies, “I told them that after our date, you’re dropping me off at Auntie Bev’s, but I was planning to use our dinner money to get a hotel room.”

As it is, entirely stationary, Nigel thinks he almost chokes on his own spit.

“A… A hotel room?” Nigel isn’t stupid, or naive, by any stretch of the imagination. He is a year Adam’s elder, he’d had sex long before he ever came to America. Hell, he and Adam had done just about everything short of penetration before now. But the thought of Adam, babyfaced and earnest, using the cash his dads had given them for a dinner date to book a place for them to have sex, had never occurred to him.

“For sex,” Adam says, as if Nigel might not understand, “I figured that your host family’s house or mine would be inconvenient, since we could get caught there. If that turns you on, we could try that later, but I thought the first time we should be somewhere private we can take our time.”

“Starlight,” Nigel gasps out, focusing all his attention on pulling out of the Graham-Lecters’ drive and actually leaving, because if he doesn’t focus, he might just get distracted kissing Adam right there, “Have I ever told you that you’re a genius?”

“Yes,” Adam chirps, “Every time I help you with your homework. Now hurry up and drive, please. I waited two whole weeks, I’m sick of waiting.

Nigel decides that speed limits are really more like speed suggestions anyway.

late nights

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Parenthood is fucking hard. It's exhausting and terrifying and sometimes Will almost kind of hates this tiny, helpless little thing that just needs *so much* from him, all the goddamn time. He can't sleep. All the books and websites say that he should sleep when the baby sleeps, but the baby doesn't ever seem to fucking sleep. All he does is eat and shit and scream, usually in that order, but sometimes he mixes it up just to keep Will on his toes.

And besides, most people have nine months to prepare to be parents. Will had it all quite literally dropped on him with no warning. He's at the end of his rope. No, he's beyond the end of his rope. He's dangling. He's free-falling.

Adam is screaming. Will can't figure out what he wants. Even with his empathy, he can't quite make sense of the thoughts and feelings of a baby less than a month old. It's two in the morning. Will can't remember the last time he slept. The baby is screaming. Will has changed his diaper, fed and burped him, tried to rock him to sleep. Nothing has worked. He doesn't know what's wrong. The baby is screaming. The dogs have taken up Adam's song, howling a noisy harmony to the baby's indignant wails.

Will wants to cry and scream himself.

The dogs are howling.

He's distantly aware that he should be thankful he doesn't have neighbors.

The baby is screaming.

Will has taken to pacing the first floor, hoping that the motion will somehow calm Adam. He's tried shushing, tried talking to him, has even resorted to outright begging. So far, nothing has worked. The baby is screaming.

Somehow, out of the exhausted fog his brain has become, a memory floats to the surface: A voice. Not his father's, one he doesn't recognize. Higher, sweeter, feminine. Singing. He can't recall the words, but he remembers her voice, gently soothing, and a gentle hand stroking his hair. A woman —- *His mother?* —- singing to him.

Will shakes his head, chasing away the faint, blurry-edged memory. He looks down at the infant in his arms, tiny face screwed up and red as a beet. Opens his mouth, not even knowing himself what will come out.

"Well, I've heard those city singers, singin' 'bout how they can love…"

Chapter End Notes

Work has been cutting into my writing time and a new puppy has me really understanding Will in this chapter. Hence the shorter updates. But I'm doing my best and I hope that's okay. The song that Will starts singing to Adam at the end of this chapter is "Deeper Than The Holler" by Randy Travis.

swimming

“I dunno, Daddy,” Adam mumbles, eyeing him doubtfully, “It looks deep.”

Adam is five. A large cardboard box looks deep to him. Will manages to not sigh, and mentally pats himself on the back. “It’s deep, baby, but I’ll be right there with you. I won’t let you go any deeper than you can handle.”

Adam chews on his bottom lip, wringing hands making the rubber floaties on each of his arms squeak as they rub against his skin. “If I don’t like it, I can not do it?”

That’s their rule for pretty much everything. Will wants his son to experience life, but he also doesn’t want to force Adam into situations that distress him or make him uncomfortable. So they have devised a failsafe.

“Right,” Will confirms, “I just want you to try it first.”

“… Dunno how to swim.”

“I can teach you if you get in the water, lamb.”

Adam still looks unconvinced. Will sighs and decides to bring out the big guns. “Look, Hannibal is swimming.”

Adam lights up. For some unknown reason, Adam is practically besotted with Hannibal, happy to do anything if Will so much as implies that Hannibal would approve. It’s charming and, for the moment, useful.

“Hamble swims?”

Will can’t help but grin. “Wanna try now?”

“Yes! Swimming with Hamble!”

politeness

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Would it bring you comfort to know that I've never served Adam anything that didn't come from a store?"

"Served Ada—" Will splutters, tugging at his curls in an attempt to focus, use the sting to ground himself. It's a habit he's been working to break Adam from, but he thinks he could be excused for acting on impulse given the circumstances. He takes a deep breath, releases his grip on his own head, and looks into the eyes of the monster he'd trusted. Had fallen in love with. Had welcomed into his home and his bed and his child's life.

"Am I supposed to *thank* you for not feeding human flesh to my five year old?"

Hannibal doesn't look at all alarmed or bothered at Will's obvious distress, only watching him with a sort of fond neutrality that borders on patience, and the idea that Hannibal is just waiting for Will to *get over it* makes him want to scream.

"I would not give him such fare without your consent."

"Oh, how gracious of you to not make my son a cannibal unless I say you can. Really, Hannibal, you're the pinnacle of manners."

Chapter End Notes

This is one of the first things I wrote for this AU and I always figured I'd add more to it one day. Obviously, that did not happen, but I thought it was funny and wanted to share. Work and personal stuff have taken up a lot of my writing time, and I'm sorry for making you guys wait for short updates, but I'm trying to give you what I can. Thanks for being patient.

sacrifice

Chapter Notes

> TW FOR THIS CHAPTER: There is a very brief flashback to the death of Hannibal's mother, and her body catching fire afterwards.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal Lecter, eighth of his name, is a strange child. He is too serious, too quiet, almost an adult in miniature. His mannerisms could be unnerving, unsettling to those who were pinned under his gaze like a butterfly on a board. Even his own father sometimes looked at him with the dread of a man who has created something abnormal, who knows it but doesn't know how to contain it.

Simonetta Sforza-Lecter knows all this, and loves her son anyway.

"I don't understand," Hannibal says, eight years old and solemn as a little scholar, "Why God asked Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Or why Agamemnon would agree to sacrifice Iphigenia."

"Well," replies his mother thoughtfully, "I suppose because for a sacrifice to be worth offering to a god, the thing offered should be especially precious. And there is nothing more precious to a parent than their child."

Hannibal considers this gravely. And then, because despite his strangeness and uncanny maturity, he is still a child, he asks, "So you would sacrifice me?"

"Oh, my darling," His mother brushes his hair out of his face, cupping his cheek in her hand and kissing his forehead. "I'm afraid I am terribly selfish. I would not sacrifice my dear boy for all the good harvests or fair winds in the world."

Hannibal watches Adam sleep on the couch in his study, curled up like a kitten, and thinks *terribly selfish*. Hannibal has always known he was not a good man. It seemed as though he never had been. But he knows it for certain, now. Because all the good men, *holy* men, in the myths, were willing to sacrifice their children for something greater. And Hannibal would rather kill the entire world than risk a single little curl on Adam's precious head.

Legally speaking, Adam is not his son. At least, not yet. He will be, someday. Hannibal has made some discreet enquiries, and he knows how to begin the process of adopting the boy. But the heart does not obey the laws of man, and Adam has claimed him. Hannibal sees Adam as his, loves him in a way he never thought he could love. When he had first learned that the fascinating Agent Graham had a child, he had been intrigued —- A mind like Will's,

but without the mental defenses Will had spent so long forming, would be fascinating to observe as it developed.

Hannibal had planned to tolerate Will's son in order to further his access to Will and Will's incredible mind. He had not expected to care about Adam, much less to find himself loving him. To let a little boy sleep in his study and understand what his mother meant, a lifetime ago, when she said *there is nothing more precious.*

Prince Hector of Troy, holding his infant son, had beseeched the gods to grant the child strength. *May someone say of him one day, "This man is much better than his father."*

Hannibal had always thought that the countless poems and songs and such rhapsodizing on the love of a parent for a child sentimental drivel. Beneath him, elevated as he was above other men. Emotions and the expressions thereof were entertaining, but not something that could touch him. And yet, here he finds himself. His heart held in the hands of a man and a child, feeling things he had thought it could not since he was a child himself.

"You're staring, Papa."

Hannibal blinks and Adam is sitting up, rubbing an eye with his fist. How unlike Hannibal, to be so lost in thought that he hadn't noticed the boy wake.

"I was not," He says, with as much dignity as he can muster, "I was ruminating." He catches the furrow of Adam's brow and quickly explains, "Thinking very hard."

"Oh." Adam climbs down from the couch and meanders over to the fireplace behind Hannibal. He stares into the flames as if hypnotized, the warm light of the fire casting a soft, golden glow onto his face. Just for a moment, Hannibal remembers his mother falling beside a different fireplace, the hem of her skirt landing on the hearth. The flames that had licked up her dress.

She had died trying to shield Mischa and himself from the men who invaded their home. She must have known it would only have kept them out of the men's grasp for a few moments, but she had tried anyway, because they were her children and she loved them.

For a sacrifice to be worth offering to a god, the thing offered should be especially precious.

A sacrifice, not of them, but of herself. Because they were more precious to her than her own life.

Oh, my darling, I'm afraid I am terribly selfish.

"Adam, be careful." He warns, shoving the scene back behind a locked door of his memory palace.

"I'm not scared, Papa," Adam looks up towards him, smile bright. "You'll protect me, won't you?"

Hannibal swallows hard. "Yes, my dear boy."

Chapter End Notes

It’s been hard to write in this verse with everything going on in the world. I hope this au helps you the way it helps me.

generations

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will has become used to his phone waking him at odd hours. He is not, however, used to not recognizing the number lighting up the screen. He fumbles to pick up, ready to curse out a telemarketer.

"Willy, where the hell are ya? I'm here at the house and it's empty!"

Will sits bolt upright, suddenly very awake. "D-Dad?"

"Well, great, you remember your old man. Now answer the question."

Will feels like his thoughts are flowing through molasses. "You're at the house? In Wolf Trap?"

His father snorts. "That's what I damn well said, ain't it?"

Will swallows. "Yessir. I was just wonderin' why." He can practically feel his vowels lengthening, his consonants softening. The drawl trained out of him by the FBI academy slipping back in just from speaking to his father.

"Do I need to make an appointment to see my only son, boy?"

The scent of pancakes is drifting up the stairs, a sudden reminder of everything that has happened since the last time he'd spoken to his father. His dad doesn't know about Hannibal. Oh, sweet Jesus, his dad doesn't know about *Adam*.

"Willy?"

Will clears his throat. "Sorry, sir. No, you don't. I moved. Does your phone have text?"

"It does."

"I'll text you the address. But, Dad… it's been seven years."

His father sighs. "Been moving around for work." His voice is nonchalant, but Will can hear the twinge of guilt underneath. "Finally got too damn old where they made me quit. Found a place to settle and figured I oughtta check up on my boy."

Will feels his lips twitch into a smile. Despite his father's gruff nature and the distance that has grown up between them, he has never doubted that his father loved him. "I, uhh, I have some things to tell you about. But they can wait until you get here."

Will says goodbye calmly, hangs up, and promptly starts running around like a chicken with its head cut off.

Beau Graham pulls up to the address his son had given him and thinks *this can't be right.* It's a posh neighborhood in Baltimore, a large sophisticated-looking brownstone, and Beau could imagine his son here about as easily as he could imagine pigs flying.

No, this had to be some sort of mistake. His son couldn't possibly live here. Not his Will.

As Beau slowly climbs out of his truck, the door opens and a man steps out. Money, Beau can practically smell it on him, the casual elegance and almost-arrogance that came with old, old money. The man is the same height as Beau, with sharp features that remind him oddly of the paintings he saw on the rare occasions he dragged his ass to church.

He's in slacks and a sweater that probably cost more than Beau used to make in a month. It makes Beau suddenly, uncomfortably aware of his tattered jeans and his worn, holey flannel.

"'M real sorry t'bother ya, sir," Beau says, "Only that I think I musta got turned around somewhere…"

"Mister Beau Graham, I presume?" The man's voice is low and thick with some sort of foreign accent, and the sound of his own name startles Beau enough that he only nods. The man nods back, the slightest hint of a smile twitching his lips. "You aren't in the wrong place, I assure you."

And then Beau Graham damn near stops breathing.

Because behind the fancy foreign man appears Beau's little son, forty-some years out of time. It's as if he's suddenly been catapulted into the past, into heat and hunger, the ache of lost love and the confused, heartbroken cries of a little boy with blue eyes Beau could hardly bear to look at.

"Willy," Beau almost chokes on the name, despite knowing it can't possibly be right, can't be the same boy. But how could this make sense, this child stepped right out of his memories?

"I, uhh, I have some things to tell you about."

Oh.

The boy shies away from Beau's gaze, hiding his face against the fabric of the man's pants so that all Beau can really see is the delicate whorl of one little ear sticking out.

Will had his mother's ears, all sticky-out and adorable. And he'd apparently passed them on to his son. Something in Beau's heart cracks.

At the same moment, two similar voices call out similar things.

"Dad!"

"Daddy?"

Will comes running out the door, rumpled and flustered and very much the grown man Beau knows him to be. His son grasps his upper arms, his gaze a mix of affection and worry that makes Beau's stomach churn. God knew he'd tried his best, but it wasn't right for a child to worry over a parent.

"Goddamn there, boy, a card or some such woulda been nice." He croaks, "A T-shirt maybe."

"I had no way of contacting you," Will replies, half defensive and half apologetic, "You just up and left, I didn't know where you were."

And Beau knows that's his fault, really. But the realization that his only child had a child of his own Beau knew nothing about smarts worse than saltwater in a wound.

"Oh, Willy," He sighs.

It seems as though Beau blinks and he's suddenly seated in the swankiest dining room he's ever seen, and the man in the fancy sweater is placing a mug of coffee in front of him.

"A warm beverage has been proven in studies to soothe and comfort in times of shock," The man explains smoothly when Beau looks at him, "And, of course, a traditional signal of hospitality."

Sitting at Beau's right hand, Will rolls his eyes. It's a comforting hint of the quick-witted, sharp-tongued son Beau remembered from before all these sudden revelations.

"You are so full of shit," He says, voice practically dripping with exasperated affection. It's the same exact tone that his mother had used, a lifetime ago, when she used to say, *"You're a lovesick fool, Beau Graham."*

Oh. Another revelation to ponder over.

Despite another shock, he carries on. Beau Graham might not have been a perfect husband or a perfect father, but he was still a good old southern boy who'd had certain manners drilled into him, who had tried to impart those manners into his own boy.

"Little pitchers, William," He says warningly, and can't help but grin when his grown son ducks his head, chastised.

Mr Fancy Sweater looks puzzled, like he's about to ask a question, but then Will catches his eye —- *Will, his boy Willy, making eye-contact on purpose! Satan must be shivering his ass off with how hell must have frozen over!* —- and nods towards the little boy sitting in Will's lap. Mr Fancy Sweater nods like he's caught on.

The boy is currently staring at Beau, eyes wide. His thumb seems to be slowly creeping towards his mouth, and Beau bites back the urge to warn him about crooked teeth.

"Well, hello there," He says instead, trying to make his voice as light and cheery as he can. He hasn't really spoken to a child since Will was one. And even then, Will, God bless his

pea-picking heart, had never exactly been a normal child.

Will clears his throat. "Dad, this is my son, Adam. Adam, lamb, this is your Grandpa Beau."

His grandson —- Adam, Beau Graham has a grandson called Adam, and that is a name he now tucks away in his heart with *Evangeline* and *William* —- looks at him as if Will had just introduced him to a unicorn.

There are a few long, heavy moments, where they look at each other in silence. Then Mr Fancy Sweater speaks up.

"Mr Graham, I'm so deeply pleased to make your acquaintance. I'm Dr Hannibal Lecter, Will's fiancé."

Despite himself, Beau feels his eyebrows creeping up towards his hairline. "Fiancé, now, really?"

Will tenses slightly, like he's bracing for a fight. Or an impact. "Dad, can you not do this? Not in front of Adam, at least?"

"Well, do what, Willy?"

Will closes his eyes for a moment, like he's gathering his strength. "Adam, earmuffs."

Immediately, the boy's little hands snap up to press hard over his ears.

Beau's son meets his eyes, then, and says very calmly, "If you're fixin' t'give me the whole fire and brimstone, Sodom and Leviticus bullshit, you can just walk your ass out the door now, 'cause I won't stand for it, especially not around my boy."

Some distant part of Beau's brain notes the way that, during this whole encounter, Will's vowels have grown long and heavy, the hard sounds starting to drop off, especially with that righteous indignation creeping in. *Fah-ur an' brimstow.*

And then the words register and Beau is filled with a fierce pride. "Now, Willy-boy, I's just fixin' to ask if Dr Fancy Britches over here was treatin' you decent as you oughtta be. I taught you t'punch 'n shoot, and I figure you should be able to fix him up good if he ain't makin' you happy."

A slow, incredulous smile spreads across Will's face, and he drawls, "Yessir, I reckon he makes me 'bout as happy as a pig in shit."

"Will!"

"Daddy!"

Two scandalized cries burst out almost in unison and the two Graham men laugh until it hurts.

Chapter End Notes

If you were wondering, Will WAS concocting a plan to introduce Adam and Beau in the most painless, least shocking way possible. But unfortunately, Will is engaged to Hannibal “I was curious to see what would happen” Lecter, who made the executive decision to more or less spring Adam on Beau without warning. If anyone needs explanation/clarification on the southern idioms/slang Will and Beau use, I’m happy to translate.

sharing

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is dedicated to Joa. This was meant to be a tiny twitfic gift, but as usual, even in his inner monologue, Hannibal wouldn't shut up.

Hannibal sits at Will's small kitchen table, his sketchbook laid out before him as he traces out the beginnings of his newest art —- Will, the way he'd looked asleep, defenseless and beautiful.

He doesn't look up from his work, but he hears small, light footsteps approaching. Adam smells like clean laundry and that strong, artificial fruit scent that often comes with children's shampoo. The legs of Will's other kitchen chair squeaks as the boy pulls it out and climbs up into it.

From the corner of his eye, Hannibal sees Adam place a plastic box and a spiral-bound notebook on the table. He does not say anything to Hannibal, and so Hannibal, not wanting to frighten him away, says nothing to him. They sit in companionable silence for a short while, the only sounds the soft ambient noises of the dogs, the faint scratch of Hannibal's pencil, and the slightly higher squeak of Adam's wax crayons rubbing on his paper.

Then he feels a tap on his arm. Hannibal looks up, curious. Adam is watching him, his little face serious as a grown man. And then he holds out a crayon.

Hannibal looks at the offered crayon, and then back at Adam. The boy is frowning slightly, the way Will sometimes does when he's thinking hard.

"Here, Hamble," Adam says, waggling the crayon slightly as if to draw Hannibal's attention to it. "You don't have any colors."

Hannibal is amused —- Of course a child of Adam's age would see a simple graphite drawing as lacking. To such a young mind, color is a necessity, and the aesthetic of simplicity is far beyond his grasp. And yet, he feels oddly touched that Adam, who obviously seemed to prefer parallel play to person-to-person interaction, would be willing to share his modest supply of crayons with a man he doesn't know well. It's charming, in an awkward and childish way.

Hannibal flips to a fresh page in his sketchbook, accepting the offered crayon and saying "Thank you," as seriously as he can manage.

horse divorce

“Horse divorce,” Adam declares solemnly.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow at him, turning to look at his stepson in the kitchen armchair. Hannibal had been preparing for the dinner party that night, getting things ready before the hired help arrived later to assist with the cooking.

“What was that, dear one?”

“Horse divorce,” Adam says again, more insistently.

“I don’t believe that a horse can get married,” Hannibal says mildly, “So the idea of a horse divorcing their spouse would be moot.”

“No,” Adam huffs, *“Horse divorce.”*

He hops up from his seat and marches over to the counter where Hannibal was working, dragging his stool behind him. He climbed up next to Hannibal, and he pointed to the assembled ingredients spread on the counter. Very slowly, he repeated. *“Horse. Divorce.”*

It’s like a lightbulb clicking on in Hannibal’s brain. *“Hors d'oeuvres?”*

Adam looks at him as if Hannibal is the most foolish person in the world. “That’s what I *said,* Papa.”

the visitor

There is a lady under Adam's bed.

He woke up to a strange rustling noise, and when he climbed down to investigate, he discovered her. The lady looks a little strange, stringy-haired and sort of yellowish, and her eyes are sunken, and surrounded by dark circles like Adam's daddy gets sometimes when he needs to sleep more. There are dark splotches on her skin and Adam can't really tell what they are.

For a moment, they just stare at each other. Adam doesn't know what this lady is doing under his bed, but he reasons that if she's in the house, then Daddy must have let her in. Maybe she just feels safer in a small, dark space like the underneath of Adam's bed. And Adam is always supposed to be polite when they have guests.

"Hello," He says. The lady doesn't answer, but that's okay. He sometimes doesn't feel up to talking, either. Daddy always says they have to be gentle and patient with new doggy friends because they can be nervous and scared, and Adam is sure the same thing applies to new people friends.

"Do you wanna come out?"

She shakes her head no. Still, Adam doesn't think it looks very comfortable to lay under his bed. So he stands up, pulling a pillow and one of his spare blankets into his arms. He lays down on the ground, parallel to the lady under the bed, and pushes the blanket and pillow forward towards her. "Here. You can have these."

The lady looks at him for a long moment before gingerly laying her head on the pillow and awkwardly kind of pulling the blanket over herself.

Adam frowns. You're supposed to say thank you when someone gives you something. She didn't say thank you, and that bothers him. But maybe she can't talk. Maybe she's like the little mermaid when she got legs!

"Did a sea witch steal your voice?"

The lady under his bed frowns and shakes her head no. Then, in a quiet, scratchy voice, she asks, "Am I alive?"

Well, that's a silly question. "Yeah," Adam replies, "You wouldn't be here talking to me if you weren't alive."

The lady nods slowly.

"My name's Adam. What's your name?"

"… Georgia. Can you… tell me something real?"

Adam lays there on the floor, voice hushed as he tells her about his day at school, his dogs, and anything else he can think of. And when Georgia's hand slowly creeps forward, Adam reaches back and holds it.

He's in the middle of explaining how and why Pluto was demoted from a planet to a dwarf planet when he hears a creak. Adam looks up to see his daddy standing in the doorway. He looks strange, his eyes huge and his mouth slightly open. He's all sweaty, and he's shaking a bit, like the little dogs do when they get worked up.

"Adam," He says hoarsely, "Adam, get away from there."

"Hi, Daddy," Adam says, "I made a friend."

Together, Adam and his daddy coax Georgia out from under the bed. She's very thin and it turns out the splotches on her skin are sores of some kind. Adam worries about her being cold or getting her sores infected, so she wraps the blanket Adam gave her around herself. Daddy leads them downstairs and instructs Georgia to sit on the edge of his bed.

Adam goes to the kitchen, climbing up on his stool and carefully filling a glass of water. He takes it back out to the living room, and hands it to Georgia. "Hamble says it's polite to offer your guests a drink," He informs her, "I'd get you a snack, but I'm not allowed to have snacks after bedtime, and I can't reach where Daddy keeps the snacks."

"Thank you," Georgia says, barely louder than a whisper.

Out on the porch, the screen door open so he can keep an eye on them, Daddy is having a very serious, whisper-shouted, conversation on his phone.

boy's best friend

Winston takes to Adam immediately. Will is always careful about introducing new dogs to his son, but Winston immediately licks Adam's fingers through the bars of the folding kennel, and patiently allows Adam to pat his head with clumsy little hands. All the dogs are loyal to Adam and play with him happily, but it seems like Winston is the one who most often gets roped into Adam's games and antics.

Will comes home one day and finds Clarice, Adam's babysitter, laughing as she meets him on the porch. "You'll see, Mister Graham," She assures him, through giggles.

Will goes inside and stares. As if he can feel Will's confusion, Adam turns and beams at him. "Hi, Daddy! We learned about Hawaii at school today, and I wanted the doggies to have a fun luau."

Winston, dressed in a lei made of dandelions and what appears to be a paper coconut bra, regards them with a sort of weary patience.

Will is making lunch while Adam plays in his room when he hears a loud thud come from the stairway. "Adam?" He calls, "Are you alright?"

"Yes," Adam calls back.

"What was that?"

There's a moment of hesitation. "A box slid down the stairs."

Will frowns. "That sounded louder than just a box."

"… Winston was in it."

Will goes to look and, sure enough, at the bottom of the stairs is a cardboard box with rocket wings and stars drawn on it, with Winston still sitting calmly inside. At the top of the stairs is Adam, the rest of the dogs huddled behind him.

"I needed to see if my down-the-stairs rocket-launching technique would work, Daddy." Adam explains.

Winston rests his chin on the edge of the box.

Will looks out Hannibal's back door into the backyard. It's much smaller than the fields back home, but Will still owns the Wolf Trap house for when their little family needs space. And Adam, despite his uncertainty about change, seems to enjoy the new outdoor surroundings.

Currently, he's out back with the dogs and some toys, playing some sort of elaborate game Will isn't quite sure the plot of. Will stifles a laugh when he realizes that Adam has somehow gotten his astronaut helmet onto Winston.

"Spacedog!" Adam squeals, as Winston bumbles around, his snout sticking through the open space left by the raised visor.

Buster barks, and Adam pats him on the head. "Don't be jealous, Buster, the helmet was too heavy for you. You'd tip over. You can be an alien."

"Hey, Hannibal, where's Adam?"

When Will had returned from the last crime scene Jack had him attend, he was expecting to find his son and husband together, only to find Hannibal reading quietly with no Adam in sight.

Hannibal looks up and smiles in greeting before nodding towards the stairs. "He endured my company for a little while but then he went to his room. Things have been quiet, so I assumed all was well."

"See, that's where they get ya," Will replies, teasing, "With kids his age, the quieter they are, the more you oughtta worry."

He heads up the stairs and down the hall to Adam's bedroom. He isn't really expecting anything bad, but he's learned to be braced for anything when it comes to raising a young child.

He opens the door to find Adam asleep on the floor, the dogs snuggled protectively around him. Adam's little head rests on Winston's flank like a pillow. Winston, the only one of the pack still awake, gives Will a look, as if to say *Do you see what I put up with?*

Then he turns his head and nuzzles Adam's curls.

"Good boy, Winston," Will whispers, heart full.

salt

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Daddy? Can Jewish people eat sea salt?"

"Hmm?" Will looks up from where he's busy mixing butter, vanilla extract, and egg. Adam had insisted that they needed to "pay Hamble back" for all the food he had made them by making him cookies. And, well, Will had reasoned that it seemed simple enough, and it would make Adam happy.

Adam, sitting on the counter, frowns doubtfully at the recipe Will had pulled up on his phone. "The recipe says we need kosher salt. But what we have in the cupboard is sea salt. Is sea salt kosher?"

Will pauses. He had seen the word "salt" in the recipe and assumed that the salt they had at home would suffice. Now he wasn't so certain. "I don't know. Maybe we can look it up."

Adam picks up Will's phone and starts typing, scowling at the screen. "Google doesn't say."

Will puts the bowl down. The wet ingredients are well-mixed now, just waiting for the flour, sugar, and salt to be added. It seems so simple for them to be abruptly stumped. He takes his phone from Adam and studies the screen. Sure enough, Google hasn't given them any answers about if sea salt is kosher.

He scrolls down a little and spots something. "Oh! Look here, lamb. This here says that all salt is kosher."

"So sea salt would work?"

Will chuckles. "I don't see why not."

So together they mix in the dry ingredients. Adam meticulously arranges the globs of dough on a baking sheet, as per the recipe's instructions, and Will pops them into the oven. All seems to be as it should be.

Until they pull the cookies out ten minutes later.

The sea salt is *visible,* chunky, obvious grains sticking out of the cookies sporadically.

"Oh no," Will mumbles, that doesn't seem normal. Once he's sure the cookies are cooled, he picks one up and gingerly takes a bite. *Fuck.* Definitely too salty. They fucked up. They fucked up good.

"Hey!" Adam protests, smacking him lightly on the arm, "Share!"

Will sighs, but he knows Adam won't really grasp the situation without tasting the disaster himself. He breaks off a small chunk of cookie and hands it to his son.

Adam pops the chunk into his mouth and immediately spits it back out. "Gross! That taste makes my mouth sad."

"That's what I thought too."

Adam huffs. "We can't give these to Hamble! He'd shrivel up and die!"

Will snorts at the hyperbole. "I don't know what we're supposed to do with these now, but I'm *absolutely* not giving them to Hannibal."

At that moment, his phone rings. "Hello?"

"Will," Hannibal's voice is smooth and warm. "I was wondering if you and Adam had plans for this evening."

Will can't help but laugh. "Well, I'm glad you called. Adam and I have been experimenting, and we have a question for you about salt."

Chapter End Notes

If you follow my Twitter, you'll recognize this as a true story.

the sun and the son

"Did you know that the sun is a star?"

Beau looks up from his coffee, startled. By his elbow stands his grandson, where he certainly hadn't been a moment before. It seemed that Adam had inherited Will's uncanny ability to move near-silently. It had scared the living hell out of Beau when Will was small. A *lot* of things about Will had scared Beau, honestly, and he sometimes wonders if that was the reason for the distance that had sprung up between them once Will was old enough to provide for himself.

But Adam is staring up at him patiently, a mirror image of his father as a child, and Beau can't help but think of him as a second chance, cliche as it is. He thinks, briefly, of that old warning he had heard so often from his own parents, one he'd even flung at his Will a time or two — *I hope you grow up and have babies just like you.*

"Now, I didn't know that," Beau says, putting his mug down on the coffee table. "'Cause I always figured that the sun was the sun and stars was stars."

"Well, it's true." Adam has just a bit of a slur when he speaks fast, his r sound coming out like a w sound. *It's twue.* He climbs up onto the couch beside Beau. "The sun is the biggest star in our solar system. It's so big that it pulls all the things in our solar system around it with gravity."

"But the sun shines during the day, and not at night like the other stars. I never understood that bit," Beau replies.

Adam brightens. "That's on account of the sun is bigger and brighter than all the other stars. And closer to Earth than any other stars."

Beau props his chin up on his hand. "So the regular stars, we only see them at night 'cause the sun is brighter than them durin' the day?"

"Right. Every sun is a star, but not every star is a sun."

"Now hold on a minute, boy. There's more than one sun?"

"Well…"

Will wanders into the living room and discovers his father and son sitting together. Adam is explaining something to Beau, probably something space-related given his enthusiasm, his little hands almost a blur as he gestures. And Beau… Beau is listening with rapt attention, taking all of it in as if it's gospel rather than the excited rambling of a six year old.

Will can't remember if Beau ever paid attention to him like that, uninterrupted and focused. He thinks it's most likely not. In his memories, the most frequent image of Beau Graham is

his back, leading Will up and down the coast, wherever the work was good at the time. His eyes in the rearview mirror as Will curled up and tried to sleep through car rides that felt like eternities.

It makes something ache in Will's chest, something that still lives in the boats and backseats of his childhood. He wonders if his dad feels that ache when he thinks about Will's younger years. He's never asked and never been brave enough to focus his perception like that, when it comes to his father.

"Did anybody ever tell you, Adam, about the time your daddy stole a watermelon?"

His father's voice snaps him out of his thoughts. "Dad, no, don't tell him that story!"

Adam gapes at them both like he's just been told the sky is bright green.

"Daddy *stole?"*

Beau laughs, and Will feels it like a warm, worn flannel wrapping around him.

adam had a little lamb

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Aries loves his boy.

His boy is called Adam, and Adam is very special, because he is Aries's person. His very own human to look after and protect. Adam lives with two bigger, grownup persons, which means that Aries does too. Adam's grownup people are called Daddy and Papa, and they're *almost* as important as Adam. Papa bought Aries to keep Adam company, so Aries is very grateful to Papa. Taking care of a child is a toy's job, after all.

And Aries is good at his job. He is very soft and cuddly. He doesn't take up much room, and he eats via osmosis, so he never makes a mess.

Adam hadn't known what osmosis was, until he had tried to feed Aries some of his pancakes, and gotten syrup all over Aries's snout. He had gotten all sticky, and Adam had been very upset, until Papa had cleaned Aries up and explained that stuffed lambs did not need to eat the same way people did, and that Aries could get his food intake just by being near food, so he didn't have to get syrup on him.

Aries is also grateful to Papa because he doesn't like being sticky.

Papa is very fancy and very smart. He knows lots of big words Adam and Aries don't understand, but he never minds that he has to explain them. Sometimes he helps Adam look his big words up in the dictionary.

Daddy isn't as fancy as Papa, but Aries likes him too. Daddy is touchy and laughs a lot, and calls Adam "lamb", which Aries appreciates. He is a lamb, and Adam is a boy, but a boy who is sometimes called a lamb. Which makes Aries even better for him.

Adam and Aries go everywhere together. Even when Adam has to go to school and toys aren't allowed, Aries comes along anyway. He hides in Adam's backpack, very quiet and sneaky. Like a ninja, if ninjas were fluffy. The inside of Adam's backpack is dark, but Aries doesn't mind. He is a very brave lamb.

They have a lot of adventures, Aries and his boy. One time, they snuck into Papa's study, and pretended they were astronauts visiting a strange planet with towers made out of heavy old books. Perfect for a giant lamb astronaut to knock over, like the big dinosaur Adam had seen on TV once.

Papa's eyes had gotten really big when he found them, and his mouth had opened like he was going to say something, but Daddy had laughed really hard, seeing Adam and Aries in the middle of the books all over the floor.

Chapter End Notes

I’m thinking about writing more short little things from Aries’s POV if there’s interest in that.

girl problems

“How do you know when a girl likes you?”

Alana glances up to find her quasi-nephew squirming, shifting from foot to foot as if all his nervous energy was keeping him in motion.

Adam glances up and quickly adds, “As more than a friend, I mean. I’ve tried reading social cues like Papa taught me, but all the cues I’m reading are confusing.”

Alana raises an eyebrow. “Why are you asking me about this and not your dads?”

Adam actually rolls his eyes. “Because *they* obviously don’t know anything about talking to *girls.”*

Alana bites her lip. Adam wouldn’t take it well if she laughed, and he was only thirteen. She didn’t need to point out that Hannibal had indulged in affairs with women before meeting Will. Or that Will had obviously known enough about women to conceive Adam himself.

“I see,” She replies as evenly as she can, “They’re both boys, so you come for advice on girls to someone married to a girl.”

“Exactly!”

Well, it was *sound logic*, she supposed.

“Well, why don’t we start with what you know?”

Adam huffs. “I’ve already had the sex talk, Aunt Alana.”

Alana feels her eyebrows shoot up. “You have?”

“Yes.” Adam nods seriously, “When I turned thirteen, Uncle Brian and Uncle Jimmy took me to Olive Garden and told me not to stick my breadstick in anyone’s spaghetti without a napkin.”

Alana can’t help the startled laugh the bursts out of her, and Adam smiles sheepishly.

“I think Papa was more upset about the Olive Garden than the sex talk.”

Alana pictures Hannibal’s face, proud as he was of his half-Italian heritage, when he discovered that his son had eaten at *Olive Garden* of all places, and can’t help but agree with Adam’s assessment.

“What can you tell me about this girl you like?”

Adam’s cheeks turn a frankly adorable shade of pink, and he rubs the back of his neck —- Just like Will did when he was embarrassed. “Her name is Kelli. She’s in my homeroom,

and she likes movies."

"You like movies."

"I like documentaries," Adam corrects her, "Documentaries are real. Kelli likes *movies,* with pretending."

An important distinction, obviously. "Anything else?"

"Umm… She keeps staring at me during class. It's very distracting. And she thinks I'm cute."

Alana chuckles. "How do you know? Did she tell you that?"

"No," Adam replies sheepishly, "But she told Sarah, and Sarah's her best friend, so she would know. And Sarah told Ella, and Ella told Wally, and Wally told me."

Alana takes a deep breath. "Alright. So here's what you do…"

what it meant

it's late, past when they usually go to bed. Adam is unusually clingy, refusing to let Nigel out of arm's reach, as if to assure himself that Nigel is still with him. They've gone quiet, simply cuddling in the comfortable silence, when suddenly Adam speaks.

"Marry me."

For a moment, Nigel swears he stops breathing. "Wh— What?"

"Then you won't have to worry about visas or getting a job or any of it. If we get married."

Nigel's mouth has gone dry. When he forces himself to swallow, he's half-sure it echoes in the quiet. "You don't know what you're saying."

"Yes I do." Adam lifts his head from Nigel's chest, props himself up to hover over him. "I want to marry you."

Nigel thinks of his own parents, married at seventeen because they'd had no choice, because he was on the way, and still bitter about their mistakes two decades later. He knows all too well the pitfalls of impulsive decisions. He's the result of one, after all. "Darling... Adam. This is serious. You can't just go around proposing because you're scared of losing me."

Adam's brow furrows, and some part of Nigel, distracted, wants to kiss the crinkles until they smooth away. His boyfriend studies him for a moment before he speaks. "When I was six, my papa sat me down and asked for my blessing to propose to my dad."

"Starlight..."

"Don't interrupt me. I hate being interrupted. Do you know what he said to me, when I asked him what proposing and getting married meant? He said that it meant he loved my dad so much that he wanted to be by his side forever. And that he wanted to make sure nobody could ever doubt it, to let the whole world know how much he loved him."

Adam isn't fond of eye-contact. But his eyes are staring down into Nigel's now as if he could look right into his soul.

"Do you understand? That's what I want with you."

"Okay, baby."

Adam raises an eyebrow. "Okay what?"

"Yes. I'll marry you."

Adam's smile is brighter than all the stars.

shark-repellent

Cautiously, Adam dips a toe into the pool. He frowns.

Hannibal knows Adam can swim, and that the water isn't too cold for him —- The swimming center he frequents has heated pools. Their patrons pay for the best, after all.

"Is something the matter, *mielasis?"* He asks, leaning against the edge of the pool.

Adam hugs himself, making his arm-floaties squeak. "There could be sharks."

Hannibal sighs. Ever since he had watched Finding Nemo a week ago, Adam has abruptly developed an irrational fear of sharks. He insists Will check the faucet for sharks before he will submit to a bath, despite the impossibility of a shark entering his bathtub via faucet.

"There are no sharks in the pool," Hannibal says patiently, "They can't survive in chlorinated water."

Adam gnaws on his bottom lip in thought. "Animals adapt to new environments all the time. There could be a new kind of chlorine-living shark that you just haven't heard of."

Hannibal closes his eyes briefly and takes a deep breath. "If there was a chlorine-adapted shark in this pool, Adam, we would be able to see it."

"Nuh-uh! Sharks can camouflage!"

Before Hannibal can work up a retort, Will interrupts. "I have a solution."

They both look at him. At some point during their debate, Will had wandered over to a supply closet. And now, he holds a spray-bottle about half-full of a transparent blue liquid. Before Hannibal can ask any questions, Will crouches down beside Adam at the edge of the pool and sprays some of the bottle's contents into the water. The bright blue mystery liquid disperses quickly, and Will nods with a hum.

"This is a special shark-repellent," Will explains to Adam, "One squirt is enough to keep a whole pool safe. It's a guaranteed recipe."

Adam slides into the water without any further complaint, right into to Hannibal's arms. He paddles off with a giggle.

"Will," Hannibal says, low enough to keep Adam from overhearing, "This is a very expensive and exclusive swim club. *What* exactly did you just put in the water?"

"Calm down, baby," Will replies under his breath, "It's blue Gatorade in a spray-bottle."

teddy graham

It started out perfectly innocent. Ash and a few of their friends had realized that they were all taking the same Criminal Profiling class in the upcoming semester, and they formed a groupchat so they could share notes and discuss the things they learned.

It stopped being innocent the moment Professor Graham walked in on the first day and Stephen changed the name of the groupchat to *"Professor DAMN"*

Mary replied with a sweating emoji, and Nevaeh sent, *Do you think he accepts teacher's pet applications?*

Oh my God, will you guys get a grip? He's here to teach, not be ogled at.

Ash valiantly holds back a snort as they type out an answer: *We can't all be lesbians, Jodie.*

They try. They really do try to be professional. And none of them would ever dare try saying anything to Prof. Graham's face about how hot they find him. (Though it's funny to see how a scant few people stop showing up when they realize Prof. Graham only reacts to their obvious flirting with obliviousness or annoyance).

All of them are completely respectful to their professor in person. If the groupchat get spammed with peach emojis when Prof. Graham drops his clicker and has to bend over… well, that's their business.

Then the boy shows up. Every so often, maybe once every month or so, a young boy appears in the classroom. Usually off in a corner or under Prof. Graham's desk. He's about five or six, and a miniature replica of the professor. He's also completely adorable.

I think my ovaries are exploding! Nevaeh texts.

Holy shit, he spawned! Ash jokes, *Or maybe cloned himself* .

He is a pretty cute kid, Jodie admits.

I want to have his babies! Stephen's declaration is accompanied by the big-eyes pleading emoji, and Ash has to bite their lip to keep from laughing.

Prof. Graham clicks on the projector and pulls up his slides.

"Uh, Professor?" Someone else in the class calls, without raising a hand, "Is it really appropriate for… for a little kid to be here when we're talking about this kind of stuff?"

Prof. Graham sighs. "Don't worry. He's wearing noise-cancelling headphones and currently absorbed in a space documentary on his tablet. He won't pay attention to anything we say. And I couldn't find a sitter."

After that, no one questions the child's presence when he appears in the classroom. The kid is quiet and well-behaved, never doing much more than occasionally fidgeting. Prof. Graham never really acknowledges when he's present during classes, though occasionally stragglers who drag their feet on the way out claim to spot their grumpy, snappish professor bouncing the kid in his arms.

He's clearly Graham's son, but he never tells them the boy's name —- Or answers any questions about him at all. So the groupchat begins calling him Teddy Graham.

I would be such a good stepdad to Teddy, Stephen muses one day, *I would even give him little siblings if I had a uterus.*

He's too quiet for a kid, Mary answers, *Even if he's cute, that's kind of weird.*

Well, he IS in a strange environment full of unfamiliar older people every time we see him, Jodie points out, *He could just be shy or anxious .*

One day, Stephen decides to risk it and linger after class, grabbing Ash by the wrist to keep them with him as he lurks in the shadowy corner seats.

"I just wanna see what he's like after class," He mumbles, eyes never leaving their teacher as he tidies his things.

"You want more material to pine over when you get drunk this weekend," Ash hisses. But they don't pull away.

Apparently not realizing they're still in the room, Prof. Graham kneels down and gently pulls the headphones off of little Teddy's head. "Hey, you," He says, voice softer and gentler than Ash has ever heard from him, "Coast is clear. Ready to go home?"

Whatever Teddy says in response, it's too quiet for Ash and Stephen to hear from their hiding place, but Graham sighs. "He's at work right now, remember? That's why you came to work with me. We'll see him later."

Teddy is evidently not satisfied with this, given the frankly precious scowl on his little face. "I know," Prof. Graham replies, "But grownup have these nasty, annoying things called jobs that we have to do to make money. Nobody likes it. If somebody tells you they love their job, they're a big fat liar."

Teddy giggles, and Graham scoops him up, balancing the boy on his hip like a sitcom housewife with a baby.

"And besides, since you were so good, maybe we can run by McDonald's on the way home."

"My darling, please tell me I did not just hear what I think I heard."

Ash nearly jumps, and Stephen's nails dig into their hand *hard* at the sound of a new voice. Low and rumbly, with an accent sort of like Mary's grandpa.

A man is standing in the doorway of the classroom with a thermal lunchbox in his hands. He's older, with cheekbones like Maleficent's handsome brother, and a navy-blue suit.

But if his sudden appearance was a shock to Stephen and Ash, it damn near gives them a heart attack when Teddy exclaims *"Papa!"* and runs across the room to fling himself at the man.

The man carries little Teddy back towards the desk, as Prof. Graham says, "And here I was just telling him that we wouldn't see you until later."

"Well, I had a very opportune cancellation at the last minute," Mr Cheekbones replies smoothly, "And, at any rate, you are still correct. It is, in fact, later now than when you told him he would see me later. And here I am." Sitting Teddy and the lunchbox down on the desk, Mr Cheekbones leans down slightly and very casually *kisses* Prof. Graham.

Ash has to remind themself to breathe. Stephen's grip on their hand is downright painful.

As the three at the desk get distracted by their conversation —- Something about fettuccine? —- Stephen and Ash sneak out of the room. As soon as they are far enough away from the classroom, Ash whips out their phone and starts a Discord call.

"You guys aren't gonna *fucking believe this*—-"

hamble's office

Adam was with Hannibal at his office today. Will had to abruptly leave town on a case, and their normal babysitter was unavailable, so Hannibal simply brought Adam to work with him. This was not strictly protocol, but since Hannibal happened to have a rather large gap in his patient schedule that day, it was not entirely de-railing.

Adam had been seated on the carpet by Hannibal's feet with a coloring book and colored pencils while Hannibal worked on his patient records, the two not interacting, but coexisting quietly in the same space, which seemed to be Adam's preferred way of bonding.

Until, that is, Hannibal had to get up. "I'm going to the bathroom, Adam, but I will be right back," He tells the boy, just in case. Hannibal is not entirely clear yet what Adam needs explained to him or what can go unsaid.

"Mmmkay," Adam doesn't look up from his coloring book.

Everything is completely ordinary, until, as Hannibal is zipping his fly and washing his hands, he hears his office phone ring. He hurries back to his office just in time to hear Adam's voice said brightly, "This is Hamble's office!"

"Adam," Hannibal says, alarmed by the havoc a five-year-old answering his work phone could wreak on his practice, "Give me the phone, please."

Adam scowls at him. "Hamble, don't be rude! I'm talking to somebody!"

The phone isn't anywhere close to Hannibal's ear, but he can still hear Mrs. Komeda laughing.

"Do you have a new secretary, Hannibal?" She asks wryly when he manages to wrest the phone away from his charge, "I was just speaking to a very charming young man."

"I apologize for that," Hannibal replies, eyes still on the child now pouting in his office chair, "Adam accompanied me to the office today, and he took it upon himself to answer the phone while I was out of the room."

"Oh, don't apologize! It was quite endearing. And in any case, you *do* need a secretary, you know."

Hannibal can't help but laugh along with her at that.

adam vs the microwave

“Papa, I think I messed up.”

Hannibal frowns. Adam doesn’t usually call him when he’s at work. He knows Hannibal’s work is very important, so he only calls Hannibal during office hours if it’s something important and he can’t reach Will. In the background of the call, there’s a strange sort of buzzing noise.

“What seems to be the problem, Adam?”

“Umm… the microwave is smoking.”

Hannibal knows he can’t actually skip a heartbeat, but it certainly feels as though he can. “Adam, turn the microwave off right now.”

“O-Okay.” The buzzing stops.

“Good. Now I want you to get away from the microwave. And tell me what happened.” Anxiety, rare as it is for Hannibal, thrums in his veins.

“I… I was trying to make those noodles like we did the other day,” Adam’s voice pitches higher with anxiety. “But I’m not supposed to use the stove when you and Dad aren’t home, so I put the pot of water in the microwave, and it started making weird sounds and smoking.”

Hannibal sighs. He will likely have to replace the pot and microwave, but at least Adam isn’t hurt. Cookware and electronics are a paltry cost, compared to Adam being harmed.

“*Tesoro mio,* you cannot put metal in the microwave. It’s very dangerous, and you could have started a fire.”

Adam whimpers softly. “I’m sorry!”

“It’s alright, my darling,” Hannibal soothes, “You didn’t know. Objects are replaceable, you are not. All that matters is that you are safe. Though I will request that you remain out of the kitchen until I get home.”

Adam hums an acknowledgement. “Okay.”

concoction

“I want concoction,” Adam announces suddenly, as Hannibal is getting ready to start dinner preparations.

“I don’t know how to make that,” Hannibal replies, “You would have to instruct me.”

“Not you. Daddy.” Adam frowns up at him.

“I beg your pardon?”

Adam sighs, as if Hannibal is being deliberately obtuse. “*You* don’t make concoction. *Daddy* makes concoction.”

“You want your father to cook, rather than me?” Hannibal checks, to be sure he understands.

“Yes.”

It stings like rejection, however irrational that might be.

“What is concoction?” Hannibal asks when Will arrives home.

Will pauses, as if caught off-guard by the sudden question.

“Adam has requested it,” Hannibal elaborates, “And informed me that it is a specialty of yours, rather than something I can make for him.”

Will blinks a few times, and then laughs. “And you hate that, don’t you? You’re pouting.”

“I am not pouting,” Hannibal replies, with as much dignity as he can muster.

Will digs around in the cabinets until he produces a large pan, and places it onto the counter with a loud *thunk.* “Do you have any hamburger? And I mean real hamburger, not *long pork* hamburger.”

Hannibal nods, somewhat bemused, as Will putters over to the pantry and starts rummaging around.

After a few moments, he calls, “How do you not have any Campbell’s in here?”

Will decrees that a trip to the store is necessary.

Hannibal is instructed to brown the hamburger in Worcestershire sauce while Will combines the other ingredients — Elbow noodles, chicken gumbo from a can, and that kind of cheese that comes out of a bag. Hannibal tries to complain about the ingredient quality, but Will waves a spatula threateningly in his direction, and Hannibal is startled enough to give up.

Once the mixture is cooked, Will plates up three servings of it and puts the rest into a Tupperware container he places in the fridge. Adam is delighted by the meal, pausing often through dinner to flap his hands excitedly.

“How did you come up with this recipe?” Hannibal asks later, as the two of them are getting ready for bed.

Will shrugs. “I just threw it together one night with what I had in the house. That’s why it’s called *concoction.”*

evangeline

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Evangeline Blanchard had always been called a beauty. With her long brown curls, wide blue eyes and songbird voice, she had grown up hearing how lovely she was, how charming she was, how she was obviously meant for bigger and better than their podunk little town. So it was no surprise to anyone when she left town the day after graduation. Everyone knew that Evangeline Blanchard was meant for more.

And yet, Evangeline ended up in a run-down trailer out in the bayou, married to a boat mechanic, with a screaming baby who depended on her for everything. So far away from the dreams of Hollywood and Nashville that she had grown up being told were practically her birthright. Evangeline had always been told that she was special, and yet the life she was living was anything but special. Just the same life as countless other women who came from nowhere and never went anywhere. She had loved Beau at first, or at least felt something close to love for him, but he wasn't the man who she'd have chosen to marry. She wouldn't have married him if she hadn't *had* to.

If not for the baby.

Little Will is the spitting image of her, right down to the sticky-out ears that can't quite be hidden under his curls. But he's also needy and loud and strange, and Evangeline almost resents him. For demanding so much of her, for tying her to a backwoods, blue-collar laborer, for changing her body. And he looks so much like her that it makes her want to scream. Because he's hers, her son, her blood. Grown and nurtured inside her own body. But the overwhelming crescendo of all-consuming maternal love had never come. Only a sense of duty, a sort of detached fondness like one might feel for a pet, and the haunting awareness that she *should* feel more for him. Should love him like a proper mother. But that tidal wave of affection she had been assured she'd feel had never hit her. Just another way in which her life had failed to measure up to what she'd been told her life should be.

"I'm sorry," Evangeline says to her two year old son, sitting in his high chair. His eyes are wide and solemn and too strangely, eerily knowing for a child his age. Every time he looks at her, she feels as though he can see into her, see all her flaws and inadequacies, and he must be judging her. "You deserve better than me."

Will smiles up at her, pearly little baby teeth on display. Will is a serious little man, who hardly smiles. And Evangeline wishes she was the kind of mother who could delight in a rare smile from her baby, but all she feels is a deep, empty ache in her heart. She doesn't love him the way a baby should be loved. Ever since Will was born, Evangeline has felt like she's drowning, sinking deeper and deeper under the dark water, until she's suffocating under the pressure. Under the weight of *wife and mother.* Of everything she was promised but never accomplished, and everything she should be but has failed to manage.

Evangeline kisses her baby's forehead, wishing she could have been the mother he deserved, picks up her suitcase, and walks out the door.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the delay since the last chapter. Life has been very busy and very dramatic, so I haven't really been in the right headspace to write. And it resulted in this. I actually feel very sad for this version of Will's mother. I see her as being very disillusioned and overwhelmed by her life, and also suffering from a hearty dose of postpartum depression that she doesn't have the resources to treat. Not necessarily a bad person, but a person who just couldn't quite cope with the cards dealt to her.

On a lighter note, Evangeline's first and last names are both references, and if anyone can guess them both, I will give you… an internet gold star sticker. And I fancast Jodie Foster (circa Clarice Starling) as Will's mother, because nobody can stop me.

trying

Will looks like his mother. Adam looks like Will. Sometimes Beau is caught off-guard by how the curious tilt of his son's head or the particular blue shade of his grandson's eyes can make his heart ache with memories of a woman who hadn't quite loved him —- *them* —- enough.

"What happened to his mama?" Beau asks his son one evening, the two of them sat in a fancy Baltimore living room with a bottle of Crown Royal and a pair of tumblers sat between them. Beau had raised his eyebrows when he saw the logo on the label, but Will had simply shrugged, as if to say *What can you do?*

At the question, a darkness flickers momentarily over Will's eyes. How many times has Beau glimpsed that darkness during the years bringing Will up? How many times has Beau been painfully reminded of Evangeline, of the slow deterioration of her smiles, and the dark moods she became more and more prone to?

(Beau is a man haunted by the specter of lost love, ghosts in the form of living people he loves.)

"I dunno," Will replies, with a shrug just a tad too slow to be casual. "It was one night, and honestly, I don't remember most of it —- Don't look at me like that," He interrupts himself and shoots Beau a look. A capital L *Look.* (Like the kind Evangeline used to give him when she expected him to argue with her or somehow judge her. Even forty-some years later, he can't help but compare Will's behaviors to his mother's, and even forty-some years later, he is still surprised by the similarities).

"I didn't give you any kind of particular look," Beau protests.

"Yeah, you did. You have this look, like you're disappointed but you aren't gonna say anything about it, to be polite. I know you." Will rolls his eyes. "But, anyhow, I didn't really know much about her. Still don't. But she must have looked me up or something, 'cause she dropped Adam on my porch nine months later."

Beau's eyes widen at the revelation. "Just left a newborn on your porch like the fuckin' stork dropped him off?"

"That's what I said too," Will nods solemnly, taking a sip of his whiskey, "But yeah. Kinda makes me wonder if something is just naturally wrong with Adam and me, that our moms would just leave us when we were just little."

If the memory of Evangeline is an ache, those words from his son's lips are a needle-prick, sharp and sudden and unexpected. How long had his poor boy been thinking those things about himself and not told him about it? Even if Beau hasn't always been the most constant presence in Will's adult life, he would have thought Will would've felt safe coming to his own father with such feelings.

“It wasn’t your fault.”

Will’s head whips towards him, as if he’s shocked, and for a moment, all Beau can see is the toddler he once was, sitting in a high chair with a ziplock baggie of cheerios and a soggy diaper, bawling into the silence of an empty trailer and not understanding why nobody had come to soothe his complaints.

“Will, it wasn’t your fault,” Beau repeats. “I don’t know quite why she took off, but it wasn’t something wrong with you.”

Will snorts. “First time I’ve ever heard there *wasn’t* something wrong with me.”

“Your mama…” Beau hesitates. They’ve never spoken much about Will’s mother. The heartache was too deep for Beau, and the hole of her absence was too raw for Will. But, since he had asked about Adam’s mother, Beau supposed they were due a little *quid pro quo.*

Will is watching him, with Evangeline’s eyes and hair and even her ears. Beau is frightened of and for him, and loves him so much that he can’t find the proper words for it. Enough to shoulder his way past his own loss and the ghost of a slowly-fading girl.

“Your mama was charming and whip-smart but she was… sensitive. Whatever she felt, she felt it turned all the way up. I think she could… not read people like you can, but she could just tell things about people. And she had big dreams, that girl. Everyone in her little hometown told her she was practically born to be special and famous, and when she didn’t get that handed to her, she didn’t know how to handle it.”

Will is drinking it all in, a veritable flood of information about his mother compared to the few and far between drops he’d gotten prior to this. Things have changed between them. (Adam, Beau thinks, has changed things between them).

“She tried, Will,” Beau says gently, “She tried for two years to be the sort of wife and mama she was supposed to be. But she just couldn’t manage it. It was… like a flower kept out of the sun. I watched her wilt. I could see it happening. I didn’t want to say anything, because I hoped it would get better, but it didn’t. She just kept trying and failing. It was killing her, I think, Willy.”

“She should have tried harder,” Will spits back, eyes wet and fierce. He’s angry, now, or at least trying to be angry. Beau understands. Anger is easier than sorrow. “Just because she wasn’t happy, that doesn’t mean she had to fuck us up too. You didn’t deserve to be abandoned. I didn’t deserve it.” His voice wavers. “She should have tried *fuckin’* harder.”

His poor Will. For all his strange ability to see all points of view, he has such a blind spot when it comes to the woman who gave him life. Beau sighs, reaching out and wrapping his arm around Will’s shoulder. And Will, despite being a grown man and a father himself, allows it and leans against Beau’s shoulder.

“I managed,” Will mumbles into Beau’s flannel, “I had no idea what I was doing, and I was scared shitless. But I managed. Why couldn’t she?”

“Not all of us can be as strong as you are, darlin’.”

very kissable

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Adam is three months old when Will kisses Alana Bloom in his kitchen.

It's a good kiss, as far as kisses go. A little awkward, maybe, but soft. She tastes like cherry chapstick. Will has always thought that Alana is very kissable.

"We shouldn't have done that," Alana says softly when he pulls away. Which, okay, *not* the thing a guy wants to hear when he spontaneously kisses a girl.

"Why not?" Will asks, and he's vaguely embarrassed by the vulnerable waver in his voice.

Alana smiles a little, cupping his cheek in her hand. "It wouldn't work with us, Will. We're… with the kind of mind you have, I would always feel like I should be studying you. And you would resent me for it."

She's right. Will knows she's right. Alana is always so logical. He admires that about her, most of the time.

"And you wouldn't feel compelled to study me as just friends?"

Alana doesn't answer directly. Instead, she says, "Your focus needs to be on Adam right now. Not on a relationship. I think you're grasping for balance right now, and I can try to give you that. But only as a friend."

Will nods, eyelids fluttering as he leans his face into her touch.

"Just you and me, huh?" Will bounces Adam gently in his arms, pressing a kiss to the side of the baby's head. "You and your old man against the world."

Adam coos up at him, and *God*, Will loves him so much that it feels like his body shouldn't be able to hold all of it.

"Doesn't sound like much, I know. But we can make it work. I promise."

He thinks about Alana's words, about Adam being his focus, and about making a grasp for balance. Here and now, with Adam in his arms, he certainly feels balanced. As if his entire center of gravity has shifted, and the world now spins around the precious little creature in his arms.

"So, there's this girl," Will begins, and smiles when Alana snorts.

"Will, you don't start sentences like that at your boyfriend's table."

“Not for me!” Will laughs. “I just thought you might get along with her.”

“Are you trying to set me up, Will?”

He shrugs. “You recommended Hannibal to Jack, and that’s how I met him. Figured I oughtta repay the favor.”

“Alright then.” Alana takes a sip of her beer. “Tell me about this girl.”

“She’s a patient of Hannibal’s. I met her at his office. She was curious about me, and dropped by for a visit. She’s a good person. Kind of closed off at first, but I’m one to talk.” Will decides not to mention what exactly Margot had wanted when she came to his house.

“I’d say you can ask Hannibal for her number, but I think that’s against the psychiatrist rules.”

Alana laughs.

Will is grading some papers when he overhears a conversation floating through the air from the kitchen.

“So, you and Daddy are husbands. And Aunt Margot and Aunt Alana are wives.”

“That is correct,” Hannibal replies.

“But Uncle Jack has a wife instead of a husband?”

Hannibal replies solemnly, “We must respect people of all walks of life, Adam, even if we don’t agree with their choices.”

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Noct, who correctly guessed the reference to my favorite movie in the last chapter (and is also my datemate!!)

visiting

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The woman sitting before them seems almost ethereal. Her hair looks like spun silver, twisted into an elaborate updo. Her dark eyes are clear and sharp, without a hint of age. Her very presence seems indomitable, commanding attention and respect. Will thinks, strangely, of the *grande dames* of those shows Hannibal likes, about old-timey rich people and their old-timey rich people problems.

And Will's husband, proud and arrogant as he is, bends to brush his lips against her cheek. He doesn't protest when the woman reaches up to pat his cheek, like he is a child she's indulging. She says something to him in French, and though Will can usually muddle along with the language, he can't quite keep up with her speed and her sharp, strange accent.

Still, he thinks he makes out the words *garçon terrible*, and smiles to think of anyone calling his tall, imposing, and dreadfully cultured husband a *terrible boy.* Even more astounding, Hannibal merely smiles fondly. He straightens up, then, though his hand remains atop the lady's smaller one.

Adam is pressed against Will's leg, his little hands clutching the stiff fabric of Will's fancy dress pants. Hannibal's whiskey-dark eyes are warm as he says, pride practically dripping from his voice, "My dears, this is my aunt, the Lady Murasaki Lecter. Lady Murasaki, allow me to present William and Adam Graham-Lecter, my husband and son."

Murasaki observes them, her expression inscrutable. Her eyes are warm in their darkness, like black coffee or the rich soil of the forest floor. Will deliberately does not meet her eyes, keeping his mental forts as strong as he can make them. It seems almost rude to intrude upon this elegant woman's mind, even involuntarily. He isn't quite sure how to address her, nobility both in her native country and by her marriage. Her husband, Hannibal had told him, used the title of Count Lecter by courtesy after the disappearance of his elder brother, despite the title technically belonging to Hannibal. Would that make Lady Murasaki a countess? With her husband dead, that would be a… *what was the word?* A dowager countess? Fucking Europe with its fucking titles.

Will isn't sure, so he simply inclines his head respectfully, and says, polite as a good old southern boy can be, "Ma'am."

Murasaki's lips curl into a small smile, as though she's amused. She drops her gaze slightly, and their eyes meet. For a moment, Will catches a brief glimpse of her mind, in flashes of images like Polaroid shots —- A tall man with bright, flamboyant clothes. He resembles Hannibal, in a way, but not as broad and not as guarded. There is an openness in his face, an earnestness. Will catches rapid flashes of him, all warm and loved in memory.

A young woman with Hannibal's cheekbones and maroon-whiskey eyes, exhausted but smiling, with a newborn baby in her arms. The man from before and another man, taller and

older, sitting on either side of her.

Letters, accompanied by photographs. A little boy, frozen in stages of growing. Tales, glowing with pride, of his precocious accomplishments. The boy is deeply loved by doting parents and distant but fond aunt and uncle. Eventually, he's joined by another child. The letters speak of the bond between the children, the adorable protectiveness of the solemn boy genius. And then, suddenly, the absence of letters. Horrible rumors from the east but only silence, frightening silence, from those loved ones.

And finally, the boy in the photos. Older, hollow-cheeked, in too-big clothes that hang off his frame. His eyes are shadowed, and he doesn't speak. Will watches the boy through her snapshots of memories: Carefully arranging a vase of flowers. Plucking gently at the strings of a lute. Sitting cross-legged on the floor with a petite girl who must be a younger Chiyoh, folding paper cranes. Washing blood from his hands with a smile. Growing, changing. By turns endearing and frightening. Panting and tearful, blood soaking up to his elbows.

I love you.

What is left in you to love?

Will blinks, and draws himself out of her memories. The old lady holds his gaze. Neither of them speak, but there is a moment of acknowledgment between them: You have loved and been loved by him too. You have been marked by that love too.

The whole thing takes only a few heartbeats.

Murasaki nods to him, and Will nods back. There is something intangible but strong binding them. Not many people can say they have truly felt Hannibal Lecter's love, much less survived it.

"I never thought to have any children," She says, her English slow but certain, "It was not the path my life was to take. But now I find my family larger than I thought it could be." Her eyes shift to where Adam is half-hidden behind Will's legs.

Without looking away from Adam, Murasaki says something to Hannibal in French that Will can't quite grasp. But it makes Hannibal smile, and he kneels down, still beside his aunt's chair.

"It's alright, my darling," He coaxes, in that soft, gentle tone he only ever uses with Adam, "There's no need to be frightened. I promise my aunt won't bite you."

Adam looks up at Will, and Will smiles, projecting an ease he doesn't quite feel. "Go on," He encourages, gently pulling Adam's hands off his pants-legs. He gives Adam a gentle little push forward.

Adam's eyes go wide, but he doesn't protest. He stumbles forward, and Hannibal easily steadies him. He holds Adam by the shoulders, and whispers something in his ear. Adam nods, and turns to face the stately lady still looking down at him. Stiffly, Adam bows, and says softly, *"Bonjour, Madame."*

Lady Murasaki's smile grows, and she bends slightly forward. *"Bonjour, mon petit."*

Adam looks at Hannibal, who nods encouragingly. Adam smiles back, shy and hesitant.

He turns back to Murasaki and asks, very politely, "Will you tell me a story about when my papa was little?"

The look of dread on Hannibal's face makes both Murasaki and Will laugh.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the long wait. Happy Hanniversary.

decisions

Chapter Notes

TWs for this chapter: Vomiting, murder tableau descriptions, and an (imaginary) execution scene

Adam is fast asleep, snuggled up in Will's lap. His head is leaned against Will's chest, one little hand squished between his face and Will's body. His lips move slightly in his sleep, eyes rolling and flicking under his delicate little eyelids as he dreams. Will watches, tenderness welling up in him like a cup flowing over its brim. It almost hurts, this love. It feels so much bigger than his body should be able to contain.

"I love you," He whispers, lips pressed to the curls at the crown of Adam's head, "God, I love you so much." Adam stirs in his sleep, face turning to nuzzle against the fabric of Will's sweater. Will hugs him, a gentle little squeeze. He rests his chin on the top of Adam's head. Adam mumbles something incoherent, tiny fingers gripping Will's sweater.

Will takes a deep breath, inhaling the sweet child-smell of soap and shampoo, artificially-strong fruit scents, and clean skin. "I'm gonna look after you," Will murmurs, "Don't you worry. Everything is gonna be okay, I promise, sweetheart."

On the hotel bedside table, Will's phone buzzes. Despite himself, Will glances over. The screen is lit up with the words **HANNIBAL LECTER.** Will reaches out and flips the phone, so he doesn't have to see the screen.

Will feels a sick lurch in his stomach, just as he had every time his psychiatrist-turned-lover's name appeared on his phone in the week since Will had taken Adam and run. Remembering the puzzle pieces clicking into place with a nauseating clarity. The blurry picture suddenly coming clear —- All the puns, all the sly references, all the little coincidences that added up and up and up until there were too many to brush off as happenstance.

He remembers Adam in Hannibal's dining room, his face lit up in delight at being permitted to participate in such a fancy, grown-up dinner setting. His feet dangled far above the floor. He had to sit on a stack of pillows to see over the table. The memories make bile rise up, hot and acrid, in Will's throat. He forces it down.

Love and disgust war in his gut. Hannibal was a monster. Hannibal was a man. A man with reasons for what he did, no matter how idiosyncratic they might be. A man who loved him, a man Will loved. A man Will's son loved, who Adam called "Papa." Adam missed Hannibal. Had asked for him already more than once in the week they had been gone. Adam doesn't understand why Will had suddenly left the dogs with a neighbor and left. Why he's

driven them, without any warning, to another state. And especially why Hannibal hadn't come with them.

Will has no idea how to explain any of it to him. No idea how to make Adam understand. Will doesn't quite understand it all, himself.

The phone buzzes again.

"I wish you would stop," Will whispers, as though Hannibal might hear him. He isn't quite sure, even within his own mind, whether he means the calling or the killing. Without his permission, his mind drifts back to the last Ripper tableau he had seen, the one that had helped him finally realize the truth.

It had been oddly simple, for the Ripper, and yet evocative. A man, knelt in a position like prayer. But rather than folded, his hands were raised and cupped. In his hands, he held up a human heart, like an offering to an ancient deity. His chest had been wrenched open, making it clear that the heart he offered up was his own. In his hollowed-out chest cavity, where his heart and other organs should have been, were flowers. A multitude of them, spilling out over his bent arms.

"Red roses," Jimmy noted wryly, "A classic choice, if Mr Ripper's gone a-courtin'. In the traditional language of flowers, they symbolize passion, desire, and true love."

Jack's expression twists with disgust. "What about the others?"

Jimmy hums in thought. "Well, there's white roses, too. They mean innocence and purity. The others, I would have to look up."

Zeller snaps more photos.

Hours later, Jimmy looks up from a thick book of flower symbolism, photos of the flowers at his side, and reports, "Dianthus barbatus means gallantry."

Will closes his eyes. Hears Hannibal gently teasing him. "There are flowers named for you. Dianthus barbatus are commonly known as Sweet Williams."

"Lilac symbolizes the joy of youth," Jimmy continues, "And hydrangeas… hydrangeas stand for parental love. Does the Ripper have a little Ripper Junior?

Like the heavy clang of a prison cell's bolt sliding home behind him, the last piece of the puzzle clicks into place. And Will… Will sees.

For a moment, Will had been flattered. His first, instinctive reaction, was to be charmed. After all, this tableau had been a gift for him. For him, and for Adam. A declaration of love, for them both. It was endearing, he thought, for a fleeting moment. Then he'd realized what exactly he had been dreamily admiring, and the horror struck. So he had hastily made his excuses and run. And now here they were, in a cheap hotel room, clutching his son and wishing his phone would stop vibrating.

He wonders if Hannibal had made any tableaux since he left. Wonders what the display would mean, if he did. Wonders if any of his coworkers would be able to put things together as Will had.

The thought of Hannibal being caught, of him being imprisoned and tried, kept locked up and maybe even executed, sends a jolt of ice down Will's spine. For just a moment, he can vividly picture Hannibal strapped down to a gurney, soft inner arms pale and exposed as someone slips a needle into his skin. He sees Adam on the other side of the viewing room window, tiny hand pressed against the glass and tears rolling down his cheeks.

Will's stomach churns again. He hastily puts Adam aside and stumbles to the bathroom. He manages to make it to the sink before the meager contents of his stomach come up. Will makes the decision without really deciding: He'd rather have Hannibal free and killing rather than not killing, in prison or the grave. Now that the images are in his mind, it's not even a choice. He might struggle with the idea of Hannibal taking lives, but the thought of Hannibal's own life being confined or taken is unbearable.

"Daddy?" Adam calls sleepily from the main room, "Your phone is buzzing again."

"Pick it up for me," Will calls back.

A few heartbeats later, he hears Adam's joyous shriek. *"Papa!"*

confrontation

The only warning Hannibal gets is a soft footstep behind him, and the familiar smell of soap, apple-scented shampoo, and his son's natural scent, like sugar and petrichor. When he turns away from the refrigerator, Adam is standing at the counter island. Holding Will's FBI-issued pistol in his hands, tears in his dark blue eyes.

He keeps his voice calm. "What are you doing with that, dearest?"

"D-Don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't call me that."

Adam's hands are shaking. His grandfather taught him to shoot, but as far as Hannibal knows, he has never touched a gun without Beau's hands or Will's wrapped around his to guide and support them.

"Adam," Hannibal says, voice steady and quiet, like he's reassuring a distressed patient, "Why don't you give that to me, hmm?"

"I *can't* ," Adam's voice wavers, and the utter misery on his face bothers Hannibal more than the fact that his son has a gun aimed at him, "I can't do that. You aren't safe."

Hannibal, of course, has never been safe. Not to anyone but his husband and son. Even beasts love their packs. Adam has never been in any danger from him. But now, for some reason, he obviously feels threatened enough to have not only found where Will keeps his gun, but to point it at one of his fathers in their home. And that's when it clicks. There is only one reason Adam would feel frightened enough of Hannibal to prompt this. He knows.

Hannibal thinks of Will, of the confrontation they'd had when his future husband had realized the truth. Will's hands had shaken too, though he hadn't had a gun. He'd fully expected Hannibal to kill him for knowing his secret, and had been surprised when Hannibal had embraced him instead. "*Remarkable boy,"* Hannibal had said afterwards, *"It could only ever have been you*."

But Adam had figured it out too. Of course he had. With Will's cleverness and Hannibal's instruction in how to observe, of course their brilliant son had uncovered the secret. He was the best of both of them.

"My darling--" Hannibal tries again, but Adam flinches, hands tightening reflexively on the handle of the gun.

"I…" His voice breaks, and Hannibal squeezes his hands into fists against the urge to comfort him. "I have to deal with you. To… to protect Daddy."

Oh, what a beautiful, clever, *brave* boy they had.

“Your father does not need protection from me, Adam,” Hannibal says, keeping his voice low, as if to soothe a frightened animal. “I would never harm him.”

Bizarrely, he recalls, out of nowhere, an incident when Adam had stumbled across Will and Hannibal stealing a private moment. Adam had believed Hannibal was harming Will, and had attacked with all the fury a five year old could muster, to defend his beloved father. Hannibal feels the urge to laugh, and forces it back.

“You kill people,” Adam replies.

“One does not preclude the other,” Hannibal says gently.

Adam falters. Clearly, he had expected Hannibal to deny the accusation. “How can you do that?”

Very easily, Hannibal thinks, *once you get the hang of it.* But he doesn’t say it. His particular brand of humor would not go over well in a moment like this. Adam’s hands are still shaking. Hannibal is almost afraid that he will drop the gun, and it could fire accidentally.

He thinks of the butcher in Paris, the first man he killed. An uncouth, brutish beast of a man. How satisfying it had been to slash into him with the sword of Lady Murasaki’s ancestor. Crossways, as he had so crudely jeered.

He thinks of the men who killed Mischa. Singing her favorite song as his childhood horse strangled a man. Carving his sister’s initial into a living body, screaming. *M for Mischa.*

Thinks of all the people he has killed since then, simply because he wanted to.

“Because I see those I kill as undeserving of life,” Hannibal says honestly, “And because I like it.”

It is a long, difficult conversation. Hannibal explains his past and his reasoning, his method of selecting victims. He doesn’t mention his art, or what becomes of the parts he doesn’t display. Not too much all at once.

“Dad knows?” Adam realizes at some point.

Hannibal nods. Doesn’t bring up that Will not only knows, but participates in the kills. That, too, can come later. “He knows. All of my… excursions are undertaken with his blessing.”

“What does that mean?”

“He keeps me from being careless. When I want to hunt, I present your father with a name. He looks into them, makes certain there is no way that person’s vanishing could be connected to me. And if he agrees that said person deserves to die, he gives me permission to hunt them.”

A simplified explanation of their agreement, but one that would suffice.

Slowly, Adam sets Will's gun on the counter between them. He's still trembling, not just his hands, now, but his whole body. His eyes have gone glassy. He's overwhelmed, Hannibal can recognize the signs.

"I… I don't understand," Adam says, voice strained, "I don't know if I can."

"Do I need to call a lawyer, Adam?"

Adam shakes his head rapidly. "I won't tell. I don't… I don't want you to get in trouble."

That is a very mild way of phrasing what would happen to both Hannibal and Will. Adam has stumbled upon the power to destroy all their lives.

Adam is eighteen and overwhelmed and Hannibal aches to comfort him.

"Can I come closer, my love?"

Adam nods, mutely, and Hannibal moves to his side. Pulls the boy into his arms, and holds him as if he's still that confused, frightened child who had stumbled into Hannibal's study and not understood what he saw.

"You and your father are never in any danger from me, *tesoro,"* He murmurs, "You are my family. I love you more than my own life. That has not changed."

Adam sniffles. But he wraps his arms around Hannibal in return, and doesn't let go.

disappear

Chapter Notes

TW FOR THIS CHAPTER: Vague memories of Mischa's death and what led up to it

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There are very few times in his life that Hannibal Lecter has felt fear. Even fewer times that he allows himself to think about. Most of them are securely shut behind a locked door, deep inside his memory palace, that he dares not go near. Hidden away with the sounds of Mischa's laughter and his parents' voices.

He feels fear now. He's aware of it, of the physical signs in his body. The uptick in pulse, the increase in respiratory speed, the sudden sensation of unsteadiness.

They had been enjoying a quiet morning, tinged in the soft golds and oranges of a warm autumn. Will, knee-deep in the stream, fishing. Hannibal, on a picnic blanket beneath a tree, content to sketch. Adam had been playing with the dogs as they milled about.

But Adam is no longer in sight.

Hannibal feels an abrupt tightness in his chest, as though someone has wrapped their fingers around his heart and squeezed. Another symptom of fear. There was a writer, once, who said that being a parent was akin to having one's heart wander away. Wasn't there? Hannibal can't remember.

Hannibal remembers everything.

"Will?" It feels as though his voice should be a shaky rasp, but it comes out startlingly even and calm. Will turns, blinking slowly in that catlike way that indicates he's pulling himself out from deep inside his own mind.

"Adam," Will says after a moment, quickly realizing why Hannibal had sought his attention. He throws his fishing rod onto the bank, just as Hannibal puts aside his sketchbook. In tandem, they both start moving, circling the area where they had settled to relax.

They were the only people who came on this property. Weren't they? Hannibal was fairly certain. So he couldn't —- probably —- have been… taken.

Mischa's copper bathtub sitting on the hearth.

"Adam?" Hannibal calls.

Nicotine-stained fingers, bone-thin, pinching and squeezing.

“Adam?” Will’s voice, now.

Raspy voices coaxing and cajoling.

“Come, дорогая.”

“Would you like to play with us, милый?”

“малыш*, don’t be afraid.”*

Such gentle words, such endearments, sickly-sweet on their starving tongues. Sugar to coat the poison.

“Adam, come here.” His own, adult voice, sounds strange to him. Part of him is still eight, still twelve.

“This isn’t funny, Adam!” Will shouts.

“You aren’t in trouble, darling,” Hannibal calls, “But you need to come out now.”

“Would you like a treat, little one?”

There are many ways to trick a child.

They are spreading out, covering more ground. The leaves are rustling under their feet. Hannibal barely hears them. In his mind, there is snow.

She could never quite say his name right. As Adam couldn’t.

“Anniba! ANNIBA—-”

He doesn’t remember the sound that came after her screams. Doesn’t allow himself to remember. He cannot remember that sound and survive it.

“Hamble?”

“Mano paties širdis,” Hannibal breathes, and drops to his knees. He pulls Adam into his arms, holds him so tightly that he can hear the boy’s heartbeat beside his own. Wishes, for a frantic, illogical moment, that he could hide Adam away from the world inside his own chest. Keep him safe behind the cage of Hannibal’s ribs, where nothing could ever hurt him.

“Hamble, you’re squishing me!” Adam protests, squirming, and Hannibal loosens his arms just a little.

“Where were you?”

His voice is sharp with worry, harsher than he means it to be, and he feels Adam shiver, just a little, in response.

“I thought I saw a bunny,” He explains, voice muffled by Hannibal’s sweater, “I was trying to follow it. Like *Alice In Wonderland.”*

A simple, childish impulse. A whim followed without thought. Nothing dangerous. This time, at least.

“We were worried about you, dear one.”

Adam hums in reply, nuzzling against Hannibal’s sweater. “I love you, Hamble.”

Hannibal carries him back towards the stream, away from the locked door in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Some translations and notes:

дорогая: Russian for “sweetheart”

милый: Russian for “darling”

малыш: Russian for “baby”

Mano paties širdis: Lithuanian for “my own heart”

In the book, Hannibal’s family was forced to flee their home when he was eight, due to the Blitzkrieg, and lived in a hunting cabin until he was twelve, when Mischa, his parents, and the two servants who lived with them, died. I haven’t quite figured out all of my modern Hannibal’s backstory, but I thought I’d keep those ages intact, at least.

And the quote Hannibal was thinking of: “The decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart walking around outside your body.” —- Elizabeth Stone. I thought it was particularly fitting to Hannibal in this verse, as he actively made the decision to accept Adam as his child.

til death do us part

Chapter Notes

Mawwidge. Mawwidge is what bwings us togedder today.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adam rubs his eyes, fumbling to turn off his alarm clock. It's so early. He glances out the window, and, yes, the sun is barely even up. Why is he awake so early?

But then he looks around and realization hits him. This isn't the big, space-themed bedroom in Chandler Square. This is his old bedroom, from before, in Wolf Trap. Why is he … *Oh.*

"It's today," He whispers to himself with a smile.

He remembers now. And the excitement has him rolling out of bed with a giggle. He goes to the door and pushes it open. The house is so quiet, without the dogs — They'd left them at home, since they would only be gone a night. Adam hurries down the stairs, careful to hold onto the railing. If he fell, it would ruin the whole thing! "It's today," He repeats gleefully, "It's today, it's today."

The moment his feet hit the bottom of the staircase, he's off, flying down the hall as fast as his little feet will carry him. "It's today! It's today!"

Adam's daddy is still asleep, flopped across the couch, with one arm dangling over the edge. Adam launches himself onto the couch with a laugh. He lands on top of his daddy, and hears an *"Oof!"* that means Daddy is definitely awake now. Without hesitating, Adam scrambles to his feet and starts jumping on the couch-cushions.

"It's today, it's today, it's today, it's today!"

"I know!" Daddy groans from under his blankets, "I know, I know it's today. You're gonna leave footprints on me.

Adam sits immediately. It would be very bad for Daddy to have footprints all over him. "Come on, Daddy!"

"I'm up, I'm up," Daddy laughs as he sits up.

"We have so much to do!" Adam reminds him.

"Give me a minute, lamb," Daddy pulls Adam into his lap, pressing a kiss to the top of his head. "After all, I'm getting married today."

Daddy helps Adam get dressed. He's wearing a white shirt with a fancy black jacket, black pants, and a tie. The tie is black, but with little planets and stars in silver thread, that you can only see if you're looking close. Adam tries to help Daddy get dressed, but Daddy is bigger and can do more for himself. Still, Adam tries.

People who are getting married are special and important, and people need to take care of them. It said so in the videos Adam watched on his tablet. He's done a lot of research about this whole "wedding" thing. He couldn't find any information about ring bears, but there were some nice videos of dogs in weddings. Those were fun to watch, even thought Papa had been very firm about their dogs not being part of their wedding.

Carefully, Adam pins a flower to the foldy bit of Daddy's jacket. It's a little white rose, with a white ribbon tied around the stem. Papa has one just like it, and so does Adam. Papa doesn't have anybody to help him get dressed, but Daddy says he'll be okay. The flower is the last thing to go on, and Daddy steps back.

"Well? Good enough?"

"Do a spin," Adam tells him. In all the movies and internet videos he watched, the person getting married spun when they were done getting dressed. Those people were usually ladies in white dresses, not men in a suit, but Adam figures that doesn't matter. Clearly, the spin is important. Daddy smiles, and obeys, holding his arms out to the side as he does a little twirl.

Adam nods, satisfied. Then he thinks of something else in all the wedding things he's seen. "You look very beautiful."

Daddy laughs. "Adam, boys aren't usually called beautiful."

"Well, I'm a boy, and I say you're beautiful."

Daddy laughs again.

They drive to the place where the wedding is. It's still just the two of them. There's some sort of tradition about people getting married not seeing each other until the actual wedding. They don't talk very much. They have already talked a lot about what will happen today, the ceremony, and the party after, and even after that.

They're going on a trip, all four of them. Adam and Daddy and Papa and Abby. They'll be leaving tomorrow, on an airplane. But tonight, after the party, Daddy and Papa will be going somewhere just the two of them, and Adam will be having a sleepover with Abby. Nobody would ever give him on an answer about why that part was happening.

That's okay, though, because he'll see Daddy and Papa in the morning, and Abby is fun.

They park beside the big red barn where the wedding will be. It's not a real barn, no animals live there, but it looks like a barn, and that's what it's called. "Here we go," Daddy says.

Daddy is nervous. He doesn't say so, but Adam can tell. He keeps fidgeting, going to run his hands through his hair and then stopping. It's rare that Daddy is the nervous one and not him, so Adam feels very grown-up.

"You're sure you have the rings?" Daddy asks, even though he's probably asked that a bajillion times since they got ready this morning.

Adam nods, pulling the two gold rings out of the pocket on his chest to show him, before carefully tucking them back into place. Carrying the rings is a very important job. Daddy and Papa had told him that. And Abby. And the nice man from the county courthouse who was coming to do the ceremony. Adam is very proud that he's been given such a special, important job.

In the big room they're standing next to, a piano starts playing. That's important! They told Adam that the piano meant it was time!

"Are you ready?" Daddy asks, holding his hand out.

Adam slips his hand into Daddy's. "Are you?"

Daddy smiles real wide, and his eyes are shiny. "Yeah, I'm ready."

In the big room, there's a bunch of chairs arranged in a half-circle shape. At the front of all the chairs is an empty space across the front of the room. It goes from the doorway Adam and Daddy are walking through, across the whole long room, to the other doorway on the other side. And coming through the other doorway is Papa! Suddenly, it feels like a million years since Adam has seen Papa, even though it was just last night and this morning. But that's too long!

Adam tugs on Daddy's hand, trying to make him go faster. He's walking so slow! The people who are watching chuckle softly, like Adam is making a joke. He doesn't quite understand why, but it makes Papa's smile even wider, and that part is nice. Finally, all three of them meet in the middle, where the nice judge from the courthouse is waiting. Adam lets go of Daddy's hand and stands next to the judge, like he'd been told to do. Daddy and Papa stand in front of them, facing each other.

Adam is facing the guests. He sees Mrs. Komeda from the opera, and some of the people from Papa's fancy dinners. Auntie Bev and Auntie Bella are there, and Uncle Brian and Uncle Jimmy, and Uncle Jack. Auntie Alana is there, with her friend Miss Margot. And right in the front is Abby and Grandpa Beau. Abby gives Adam a smile, and Grandpa Beau shoots him a thumbs-up. Adam waves, just a little.

"Welcome, everyone," The judge says, "We are gathered here today to celebrate one of life's biggest milestones. A marriage. As the two of you are married today, I ask you to think about why marriage is one of humanity's oldest and most sacred rituals."

The judge picks up a small book from the little table next to him and opens it. "As the laws governing marriage in this community have been met, the joining of these two people will

now take place. Before the vows are said, however, it is my responsibility to remind everyone here of the significance and solemnity of this occasion."

Daddy and Papa nod. Adam nods too, because it seems like the right thing to do.

"The promises the two of you are making today are ones of irrevocable love, understanding and cooperation. Marriage is a commitment, not just to each other, but to finding and bringing out the best in one another, no matter what. It is an opportunity for growth and sharing that no other relationship can measure up to. A marriage is not simply a fact, but a living thing that you will build and nurture together. Marriage is a potential that takes a lifetime to fulfill. Please join hands."

Papa reaches out and takes both Daddy's hands in his.

"Do you, Hannibal, take Will to be your lawfully-wedded husband, so long as you both shall live?"

"I do," Papa says, and there are tears on his lashes despite his smile. Adam remembers the talk they had, what feels like ages ago, about happy tears.

"Then say your vows, please."

"I, Hannibal Lecter, take you, Will Graham, to be my lawfully-wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, 'til death do us part."

Adam thinks that all sounds pretty nice. Except for the *'til death* bit. He doesn't like the idea of his dads not being together, even after they're dead.

The judge speaks again. "Do you, Will, take Hannibal to be your lawfully-wedded husband?"

"I do." Daddy's voice isn't as deep or loud as Papa's, but it's strong and clear.

"Say your vows, please."

"I, Will Graham, take you, Hannibal Lecter, to be my lawfully-wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, 'til death do us part."

"May I have the rings?" The judge asks, looking down at Adam.

Oh! It's his bit now! Quickly, he fishes the rings out of his pocket. "Yes, you may," Adam says as he hands them over. Because he'd asked a question, and Papa always told Adam to be polite.

For some reason, that makes people laugh again. The judge smiles and pats Adam's head when he says, "Thank you, Adam." Daddy and Papa share one of those looks they do sometimes, where it seems like they're talking but they aren't talking. Both of them are smiling so big that Adam thinks it must hurt their faces.

“A ring has no beginning and no end,” The judge says. *Well, obviously,* Adam thinks, but doesn’t say, because he’s been told not to interrupt. A ring is a circle. He learned that way back in preschool. Is there anybody here who doesn’t know that? But the judge is still talking. “And so, a wedding ring is a symbol of eternity.”

He hands one of the rings to Papa, and Papa slides the ring onto Daddy’s hand. “With this ring, I give you my heart. I promise that, from this day until my last day, you will not be alone. Whatever comes, we will face it together, and I will be there for you.”

Daddy slides the other ring onto Papa’s finger. “With this ring, I give you my heart. I promise that, from now on, you will always have someone to lean on and to catch you if you fall. You will never be hungry or cold again, because I will always keep you warm and fed.”

“Your lives are now united in one unbroken circle. May these rings symbolize understanding, compassion, and togetherness, and the undying love between you. And with that, now that the two of you have publicly declared what was already in your hearts, by the power vested in me by the state of Virginia, I now pronounce you husbands.”

The judge looks down at Adam and smiles. Then he leans down and whispers in Adam’s ear. “Do you want to be the one to make it official?”

That sounds exciting! And even *more* important! Adam nods eagerly.

“Repeat what I tell you,” The judge whispers, and then tells him the words.

Adam bounces on his toes in excitement as he says, in his best grownup voice, “Daddy, Papa, you may now kiss.”

Laughing and crying at the same time, they do. Adam covers his eyes.

There’s a party, after the wedding. But it’s a quiet party, on account of Adam not liking loud ones. There’s lots of flowers and stringy lights, and ribbons. There’s tasty food, and Adam gets to sit at a special table at the front of the room, with Papa and Daddy and Abby.

People keep coming up to them to say congratulations, and to tell Adam what a very good job he did. Adam doesn’t like having so many people look at him and talk to him, but most of the attention is on his dads, so it’s mostly okay. And there’s cake, which makes everything better.

There’s music, too. First, Daddy and Papa dance, all by themselves, to a slow song, and everybody cheers. Then, Daddy dances with Adam and Papa dances with Abby. After that, they switch. Papa has Adam stand on his feet and spins him around until he laughs really hard. Then the music gets faster, and everybody dances. Grandpa Beau teaches Adam something called a line dance, and teases Daddy until he does it with them. Papa tries to join in, because Daddy asks him to, but even though Papa is a good dancer, he can’t quite keep up with Daddy and Grandpa Beau. That makes Daddy laugh a lot.

“Finally, something I’m better at!”

After that, Adam starts getting sleepy. He sits in Daddy's lap, all snuggled close, even though they're wearing fancy clothes. He kind of falls asleep, but not all the way. He's in that odd place between asleep and awake, where everything around him seems soft and fuzzy, and his body feels heavy.

"Do you want me to take him?" He hears Papa ask, as if from far away.

"Nah," Daddy answers, "I've got him."

"Do you think we should tell him about the paperwork?"

Adam can feel Daddy's hand petting his hair. "Let's wait until tomorrow, when he's conscious."

In years to come, there is a photo on their mantelpiece of Adam covering his eyes as his fathers kiss, next to a framed certificate proclaiming that Adam Graham-Lecter has been legally adopted by Hannibal Graham-Lecter.

Chapter End Notes

Unfortunately, the AO3 Writer Curse hit me hard. I had a new puppy. Then the puppy wasn't so new, but she was recovering from her spaying. Then there was family drama. Then my disabled, immunocompromised self got fucking Covid. I feel like I've been through the wars, you guys!

And this chapter took a lot of research and work. I really wanted to do Hannigram justice and make something y'all would be happy with. So, some notes:

The wedding venue is a real place. Look up The Barns At Wolf Trap, they're absolutely gorgeous. The perfect place for our boys to get married. They got married by a judge instead of a preacher because Hannibal wanted A Spectacle, Will wanted to go to the courthouse, and they compromised.

Some songs I listened to while writing this chapter, to put you in the mood: "Glad You Exist" by Dan + Shay, "Love is a Beautiful Thing" by Phil Vassar, "Bless the Broken Road" by Rascal Flatts, and "I Swear" by John Michael Montgomery (which is the song I imagine Hannigram having their first dance to).

Finally, a quote that was on my mind throughout the writing of this chapter. From Call The Midwife, in reference to a character who is getting married saying another character should give them away: *"You belong to no one but yourself. And you know exactly where you're going."*

sons

Chapter Notes

> TWs for this chapter: Mentions of child abuse, child neglect, stillbirth, and infanticide. None are actually depicted. This chapter changes tense in the last section. That's on purpose.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Evangeline was in labor for twenty hours before the doctor realized something was amiss. The baby, turned the wrong way, had become stuck somewhere deep inside, and required a long, bloody surgery to be born.

They laid him on Evangeline's chest, bloody and naked and screaming, and she had looked at him with an expression of vague befuddlement, as if she was thinking, *Why are you giving this to me? What am I supposed to do with this loud, angry little thing?*

Beau had thought, at the time, that the hours of contractions and the drugs had made her hazy; but she never quite lost that befuddled look, whenever she looked at their son.

She named him William Thomas, after his dead uncle and his grandfather who refused to acknowledge his mother's marriage, much less his existence. Two years later, she left him in a highchair with a plastic baggie of Cheerios, and walked out of his life.

Hannibal Lecter the Eighth was odd from the moment of his birth. No outraged infant wail accompanied his entrance to the world. Antanas Lecter, his father, feared the worst. He'd had a sister, a long time ago, who was born sleeping. Robertas was too young, then, to remember, but Antanas wasn't. Did such tragedies run in families?

But then the midwife had laughed. "He's keeping his opinions to himself! What a troublesome little thing."

Hope a lump in his throat, Antanas looked, and sure enough, the newborn was awake and breathing. He simply, for some reason or other, was not inclined to cry. He peered up at Antanas, as though he was curious.

"Hello," Antanas said, bemused.

Beau loved his son. Of course he did. But he didn't quite know how to handle him. Will was a quiet boy, and sensitive; prone to fits of weeping or screaming, as the mood struck, for no apparent reason. He said strange things, did strange things, and had a knack for knowing things he shouldn't know.

At times, Beau thought whimsically of the old myths of fairy changeling children. But Will resembled Evangeline so strongly that there was simply no way he couldn't be hers. (He resembled Evangeline so strongly that it sometimes hurt Beau to look at him). He had been assuming, those first two years, that he would simply work to provide for the family, while his wife tended to the baby, as Beau's own parents and every other family Beau had ever known had done.

Then she left, and Beau had to both work and raise a child, knowing how to do only one of those things. He did the best he could with what he knew. It was, Beau knew, not always enough.

Antanas loved his son. Of course. He simply didn't know what to do with him. Hannibal taught himself to read at two, even mimicked his nanny's accent when he did so. By six, he was using his yo-yo to calculate the height of Castle Lecter's towers for fun. Antanas, proud and amused and a little frightened, brought on a tutor to educate his strange, solemn son. It seemed to help, giving Hannibal a person who was dedicated solely to him, to teaching and entertaining him.

That fall, Antanas watched as Hannibal peered curiously at the squalling bundle in Simonetta's arms, scrunched up his nose, and declared, "She looks like a little red squirrel."

Weeks later, Antanas found Hannibal in Mischa's nursery, standing on his toes to give himself the height needed to see into her cradle.

"… And everyone keeps saying you look like Mother, but I don't see it at all. You're too red and wrinkly to look like Mother. Mother is much prettier than you, you know. You look a little like a potato."

Ah. Some sort of lecture, to his newborn sister, about her apparently myriad faults and failings.

Antanas watched from the doorway, wondering if he will have to intervene. He didn't think that Hannibal, despite his oddities, would ever decide to actually do little Mischa harm, but he always felt, with his son, as though he was forever waiting for something terrible to happen.

"But Mr. Jakov says that—- *oh."*

Worried by the sudden change in tone, Antanas inched forward.

Mischa had grabbed one of Hannibal's fingers in her tiny hand, and was staring up at him in fascination. Hannibal, in turn, was gazing down at her with the softest, warmest expression Antanas had ever seen him wear.

"My father cared about me," Will says, during one *just conversation,* the wine and the glow of the fireplace making his chest warmer and his lips looser than they ought to be, "But he cared the way you'd care about an old army buddy, I think, someone whose company you've

grown accustomed to. Or a roommate you really only bump into at the fridge. Not a very hands-on kind of parenting. I basically raised myself."

Hannibal considers this, sips at his wine, and then says, as if returning a favor, "I know my father loved me, but I think he was also afraid of me."

The nurses rush the DNA test results as fast as humanly possible, and about an hour after he arrives at the hospital with a screaming newborn, Will gets confirmation that it is, in biological fact, *his* screaming newborn. Though, by the time the results come through, Adam has quit screaming in favor of falling asleep. He speaks to doctors and nurses, learns that Adam was born at that same hospital. Learns the story of his name, which breaks his heart a little.

A social worker speaks to him. Tells him it's understandable that Will is caught off-guard and unprepared. That nobody would judge him for not wanting to have this sudden responsibility thrust upon him. That he doesn't have to take the baby with him when he leaves. He could just hand him over and wash his hands of the whole thing. There are always people looking to foster and/or adopt, and a healthy, ablebodied white infant will be all but guaranteed to find a placement right away.

Guaranteed to find a placement, sure, but Will was a poor kid, and then a cop. He knows an immediate placement doesn't necessarily guarantee a happy, safe, or healthy home. The poor kid could wind up with those people who foster just for money and don't care about the kids. Or people who neglect him. (*Like your father did?* whispers a mental voice Will bats away). Or abuse him. Could Will handle the not knowing? Could he live with himself if he gave this tiny, vulnerable being to the serious lady in the pantsuit and walked away?

Code Adam. A lost male child.

An unwanted child.

No, Will thinks, looking down at the baby snoozing in the crook of his arm, *Not unwanted. Unexpected, oh, hell yeah. But not unwanted.*

"He's coming home with me," Will says, "He's my son."

Chapter End Notes

I like the Daddy Graham I've made up in my head. I like his dynamic with adult Will. I don't think he was necessarily a great father when Will was young. Neglect and mistreatment can happen even if you don't intend it, even if you love your child.

On a lighter note, in Hannibal Rising, his childhood tutor was named Boris Jakov, which is an alias Hannibal uses in the show. I like to think it's a homage on Hannibal's part.

(Will’s middle name is Thomas and Hannibal’s father’s name is the Lithuanian form of Anthony. As a little joke with myself.)

slow and steady

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to Bia, @bitterbutterfl4 on Xitter.

Adam is slow to grow and thrive. Will reads all the books about babies and parenting that he can get his hands on, but according to those books, Adam simply isn't keeping up.

"There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with him, per se," Adam's pediatrician says when Will brings up his concerns. He prods gently at Adam's little arms and legs as Adam lays placidly on the exam table. (Most babies his age, Will has read, would be rolling by now, but Adam seems content to lay still). "He's a bit small for his age, but there doesn't seem to be anything *preventing* him from being at pace with his peers."

Will contemplates this. Wonders if he has, somehow, done something wrong. If Will's various neuroses and problems might somehow be impacting his son, even as an infant. "So there's nothing holding him back?"

Dr. Harris shakes his head. "Not physically, no. We'll keep an eye on him."

So Will does. Adam lags behind the other babies at daycare. He is still mastering crawling when his classmates are learning to toddle. He misses the benchmarks for when babies are supposed to start talking. The daycare workers start looking at the two of them with thinly-disguised concern and something like pity. Dr. Harris starts frowning more during Adam's checkups.

"It could be some sort of developmental delay," He tells Will shortly after Adam turns one, "Nothing is physically wrong, but he's just not able to keep up." He offers Will a thin smile, like he's trying to be encouraging, but his eyes are pitying.

Something about his manner makes Will bristle. Adam is intelligent, he can see it already in his big doe eyes, and being slower to hit milestones than his peers doesn't mean that he's pitiable. He just needs more support than other babies. And Will certainly knows a thing or two about how it feels to require more support than most people.

"It's okay," Will says to his son when they're back in Wolf Trap, "Don't you worry about a thing. Keeping up doesn't matter, y'know. Slow and steady wins the race and all that." He kisses the side of Adam's head. "I'll do whatever you need."

(Will is a little bit terrified).

He looks less into general parenting books and more into how to care for children with special needs. He starts learning baby sign language and teaching it to Adam. His boy picks

it up immediately, and soon he can sign pretty clearly. It eases some small snarl in the knotted mass of anxiety Will's heart has become. Adam is aware and smart and he's able to communicate, once he's given a method that works for him.

Dad, Adam signs at him, *Want* .

"Okay," Will replies, wiping his hands dry from where he'd been doing dishes in the sink, "What do you want?" He forms the corresponding signs as he talks. That was recommended in the research he'd done, modeling signing for him.

Dad, Adam signs again.

"Yeah, buddy. What do you want?"

His son's little baby face twists into a scowl. (It's amazing how expressive he can be without words). *Dad. Want.*

"I know," Will says, with as much patience as he can muster, "I'm right here, I just don't know what you want."

Adam smacks his hand against the tray of his highchair, the sudden noise and his son's obvious frustration startling Will. *Dad want,* he signs again, *Want Dad.* And then, *Cuddle. Want Dad cuddle.*

Realization hits Will like a truck. "Oh!" He scoops Adam into his arms. "You wanna cuddle with Dad?"

Yes, yes, Adam signs, *Dad yes.*

Will bounces him gently in his arms. "Don't tell anybody this, lamb, but sometimes your dad isn't the sharpest crayon in the box."

Adam giggles.

Adam is two and a half and Will is trying to convince him to sleep in his own bed. Up until now, he had slept in a basket next to Will's bed, or in Will's bed with him when he got bigger. It was easier for Will to tend to him if they weren't a floor apart, and Adam turned out to be a bit of a clinger.

So, naturally, he doesn't care much for the notion that he should sleep in a bed that Will wasn't also in. His innocent confusion and sorrow breaks Will's heart, but he knows it's what's best.

Will has finally managed to get Adam to settle in his toddler bed, smoothing his hand through his boy's curls until Adam lays his head down. Carefully, Will tiptoes towards the door. But as soon as he moves, Adam protests, little grunts and whimpers spilling out of him.

"It's alright, sweetheart," Will assures him, voice low and soothing, "You're okay." He reaches the doorway, blinking hard and sternly reminding himself that they need to do this.

“Da!”

Will whirls around.

Adam is sitting up in bed, clutching the railing. *“Da-a!”* He cries again, reaching out with chubby little hands.

Will cuddles and kisses Adam until he falls asleep, and then places the sleeping toddler into his big boy bed. He tells himself it’s a compromise.

sleeping

Chapter Notes

> TWs for this chapter: Mention of animal death (not depicted/detailed), and brief use of the r-slur.

For the first two and a half years of his life, Adam slept next to Will, either in a basket beside the bed, or in Will's bed with him when he got a little bigger. Often, Will let Adam sleep on his chest, his heartbeat lulling the baby to sleep.

The first time Adam crawls into Will's bed, he's three and a half. Will wakes to the feeling of something rustling under his blanket, jolts into awareness, then relaxes when he realizes it's only Adam. Then he almost has a heart attack because Adam is three and a half and managed to get down the stairs by himself. He sits up immediately, pulling Adam into his arms and checking him over for injuries. He doesn't find any, and lets out a sigh of relief.

Adam curls up in his lap and lays his head on Will's chest.

After that, Adam creeps downstairs to Will's bed about once or twice a month. After Will starts working for Jack, Adam sleeps in his bed every time Will gets home from an overnight trip.

The first time Adam crawls into his bed when Hannibal is staying over, Will is woken up by Hannibal jerking in surprise. When he sits up, he finds Adam sitting at the end of the bed, clearly in the process of trying to climb in.

When he realizes Will is awake, Adam squeaks. Will can vaguely see some sort of movement in the darkness —- Adam's hands. Will bites his lip. Adam still understands sign language, and Will has been sure to teach him more as he grew, but these days, Adam only tends to sign when he's too overwhelmed to speak.

"Baby, it's too dark to see your hands," Will says gently, "Can you try to use your words, please?"

Adam sniffles. The bedside lamp is on Hannibal's side of the bed. He turns it on.

"Ba-Bad dream," Adam hiccups, signing the words as he speaks, to be sure he's understood. There are tears marking shiny paths down his little cheeks.

Will sighs, thankful that he'd insisted he and Hannibal at least put their underwear back on before sleeping, in case something like this should happen. He grabs the covers over himself

and Hannibal and pulls them down. "Han, scoot over a little," He instructs, as he does the same. Hannibal does as he's told without question.

"C'mere," Will says, and Adam crawls up the bed and into his assigned spot, tucked between the two of them. He curls up against Will immediately.

His little feet somehow end up pressed to Hannibal's ribs. Hannibal doesn't complain. The next day, when Will apologizes for Adam's intrusion, Hannibal just says, "My sister used to sneak into my bed."

The first night that all three of them officially live in Hannibal's house at Chandler Square, they know to expect him. It only makes sense that, faced with such a monumental change, Adam would seek out a familiar comfort. Despite the fact that he'd known the move was coming and had prepared, despite the fact that he loves his new bedroom —- Bigger than his old one, full of new furniture and toys, and space-themed, stars painted on the walls —- it is only natural that Adam would be unsettled by the notion of sleeping in an unfamiliar place, alone.

So neither Will or Hannibal is surprised when their bedroom door creaks open about half an hour after Adam's bedtime. They're both awake, waiting for him.

Adam shuffles into the room, Aries the lamb dangling from one hand.

"Couldn't sleep, sweetheart?" Will asks, marking his place in his book and putting it on the nightstand.

Adam shakes his head, worrying his bottom lip between his teeth. "Too much noise."

The brownstone is much closer to the road than Will's isolated farmhouse. Will used to joke that walking down the driveway to his mailbox was a hike. Of course Adam would be bothered by the cars and other various noises of the city just beyond his window. In truth, the sounds had irritated Will a little, even. And the quiet of the country is all Adam has ever known.

"Come on up, darling." Hannibal pats the empty space in the bed they had left for him, and Adam climbs up. Hannibal's bed is higher off the ground than Will's fold-out one had been, and Adam seems to get stuck about halfway up. Hannibal grips him by the collar of his pajama-shirt and hauls him the rest of the way onto the bed. In an odd way, it reminds Will of a mother cat carrying her babies by the scruff.

Adam wiggles into the gap between them, by now used to Hannibal's presence. Hannibal drapes an arm over them both, covering Adam and resting his hand on Will's side.

Adam tosses and turns a bit, until his head lands on Will's chest and he settles.

Adam still sleeps in their bed on the nights Will gets home after work trips. Hannibal informs him once that Adam often sleeps with him when Will is away (At least for the first

few years). Over time, Adam's visits to his fathers' bed dwindle. He grows up and needs them less, learns to self-soothe. But, occasionally, he will still require that comfort.

The first time Adam realizes he was the only one not invited to a classmate's birthday party. The time he asks a girl to be his friend, after weeks of building up his courage, and she calls him a freak. The time a bully asks if his mom didn't want him because he's a retard. Each and every time one of their dogs passes. The night after Nigel leaves to return to Romania, Adam crawls into their bed and cries himself to sleep.

Will can't sleep. His son, his little boy, is leaving for college tomorrow, and Will is too anxious to sleep. What if something happens to Adam, and Will isn't there to protect him? Anything at all could happen, and Adam wouldn't be at home, surrounded by people who love him. He has the odd, irrational notion that if he doesn't sleep, the morning will simply never come.

There's a timid knock on the door.

"Come in," Hannibal calls, setting his tablet aside.

Adam pokes his head in. His bottom lip is red and chapped from being gnawed on, and the skin around his eyes is slightly puffy. He looks lost and frightened, and somehow much younger than his eighteen years. For a moment, all Will can see is the baby that used to lay on his chest, tiny and fragile.

"Dads, can I…?"

Without a word, without even glancing at Hannibal, Will opens his arms. Adam practically flies across the room, jumping onto the bed and burrowing in. He doesn't fit neatly between them quite like he used to, all gangly limbs and sharp points. It takes a lot of shuffling, adjusting, and laughter, from all three of them, to get comfortable. Will and Hannibal end up curved around Adam like a pair of parentheses, reaching across to hold hands overtop their son's body.

Adam rests his head on Will's chest and sighs, soothed by his father's heartbeat as he always has been.

absence

Chapter Notes

Saying "Happy Mother's Day" from a family with no mother just doesn't feel right. Let's explore that, shall we?

TWs: Mentions of (essentially) child abandonment, drinking, teen sex/pregnancy, and discussion of reproduction using anatomical terms.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Adam is five years old and he doesn't have a mommy.

All the other kids in his class do. Delilah even has two mommies! But Adam doesn't have one. He has a daddy, though.

They don't do anything for Mother's Day. Adam doesn't have one, and he doesn't think Daddy does, either. So it's just another day for them. Still, Adam is curious.

"Daddy," Adam asks as he's being tucked into bed, "Why don't I have a mommy?"

Daddy goes really still, halfway through Adam's bedtime story about Winnie-the-Pooh. At first, Adam thinks Daddy is upset because Adam interrupted his reading. They have been working on not interrupting and waiting his turn to talk, but Adam still messes up sometimes.

Daddy marks his place in the Winnie-the-Pooh book and puts it down. "Technically," He says quietly, "Everybody has a mother."

"Well, where is she?" Adam has never met his mother. He wonders why, now that he knows he has one.

"I don't know," Daddy says, "I haven't talked to her in a long time."

Maybe she got lost. Or maybe she's playing hide-and-seek, and she's just really good at hiding. She must be the hide-and-seek champion of the universe, to stay hidden for five whole years. As Adam thinks about it, Daddy starts running his fingers through Adam's hair. It's a nice feeling, and Adam leans into the touch.

"Her name is Marcia," Daddy tells him, "I met her at a party someone I worked with brought me to."

Marcia is a nice name. It sounds like *Martian,* which is a space word. Adam likes it. He wonders if his mommy is living on Mars. That would explain why she isn't here with them. Mars is very far away, it would take a long time to make trips back and forth.

“Was she nice?” That’s very important. Daddy always tells him to be nice.

“It was a long time ago, sweetheart, I don’t remember a whole lot.” Daddy sounds sad, and Adam grabs his other hand. Daddy takes a deep breath and keeps talking. “She didn’t think she could be a very good mommy, so when you were born, she gave you to me. She knew I would take care of you.”

“Oh.” That makes sense, Adam supposes. He doesn’t like doing things he doesn’t think he’ll be good at, either. “Well, I’m glad.”

“You are?” Daddy is frowning. His forehead is crinkled in the middle, between his eyebrows.

“Mmm-hmm,” Adam nods, “You’re a really good daddy.”

Adam doesn’t have a mommy. But that’s okay.

Adam is six years old, and he doesn’t have a mommy. Still. She hasn’t magically shown up since he first asked his daddy about her. But he has a daddy, and a Hamble.

Hamble is Daddy’s special friend. They’re more than regular friends, somehow, but Adam doesn’t quite understand it. Daddy keeps saying he’ll explain when Adam is older, which is totally unfair, because every time Adam asks, he’s older than he was last time he asked, but apparently not older *enough*.

They go to Hamble’s house for dinner on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays. And sometimes Hamble visits their house. Hamble must not know that Daddy can cook, because he’s always cooking for them, or bringing them food. But Adam doesn’t mind, because Hamble is really good at cooking.

Hamble does a lot of stuff that Daddy also does. He plays with Adam, and tells him stories, and helps him reach things that are high up. There are other things, too, things Hamble does that Daddy doesn’t. Hamble draws lots of pictures and asks Adam what he thinks about them. Lots of times, he’ll ask Adam to draw with him, and then ask questions about Adam’s drawing. He’s always asking Adam about what he thinks, or how he feels.

Daddy talks to Adam about feelings too, but Hamble does it more. He’s very interested in Adam’s feelings. And even when Adam doesn’t have the right words to talk about his feelings, Hamble helps him find them. That’s nice, because Adam has trouble with feelings-words sometimes. He has feelings, but it’s hard to talk about them, and hard for him to figure out what feelings look like on other people. (Hamble helps with that, too).

Hamble likes Adam’s daddy a lot. Apparently, that’s a part of being special friends. He’s always watching Daddy, or holding his hand, or kissing his cheek or his mouth. Adam hasn’t seen them kiss on the neck since that time he saw them through the door-crack. Adam had been really mad at Hamble that day, on account of him biting Daddy. But Daddy explained later that what Adam saw was just another part of being special friends, that it hadn’t really

hurt, and that Daddy was perfectly fine. So Adam forgave Hamble (but keeps an eye on him whenever he leans towards Daddy. Just in case).

Hamble acts a lot like Daddy. Sort of like another daddy.

One day, Adam talks about it with a kid in his class. His name is Gabriel, and he has three parents. A mommy, a daddy and a papi. Adam met one of them, once, when Gabriel's papi came to school to be a parent helper.

"What's it like having two daddies?" Adam asks, sitting down next to Gabriel.

Gabriel shrugs, focused on building a tower with the blocks. "Nice, I guess. They hold hands a lot. And kiss."

"My daddy and my Hamble kiss a lot," Adam says, picking up a block and adding it to the tower.

"What's a Hamble?"

Adam shrugs this time. "That's his name. Hamble. Sometimes my daddy calls him Doctor Lecture."

"Is he your dad too?" Gabriel asks. He passes Adam a block.

"I don't know."

When they have library time later that day, Adam finds the books about families and reads as many as he can. When Hamble picks Adam up at pick-up time, Adam tells Miss Becky, the teacher's helper, that Hamble is his papa.

Adam doesn't have a mommy, but he has a Daddy and a Hamble, and that's okay.

Adam is ten years old, and he doesn't have a mom. Well, technically, he does, because everybody does. But he doesn't have his mom in his life. He has a dad and a papa, and he's perfectly fine with that.

After he asks Dad about how babies are made, Papa sits down with him and shows him a biology textbook. He explains things, in technical terms — because technical terms are *important* when it comes to this, apparently — but in a way that's easy to understand. Papa even has a PowerPoint. With pictures and diagrams. Adam learns a lot of things that day. He's not sure he can ever look at his dad the same way again, but he understands sexual reproduction now.

It's very simple, really. Dad put his penis into Marcia's vagina, and his sperm combined with one of her eggs, and that made an embryo that implanted in Marcia's uterus and eventually became Adam. He lived inside Marcia's uterus — her uterus, not her stomach, pregnant people get really big in the stomach area, but the uterus and the stomach are *not* the same thing — for approximately nine months, and then he came out. And that was when Marcia gave baby Adam to Dad to take care of. Adam thinks that it doesn't quite seem fair to not

want a baby after you already spent all that time growing it. But Papa was very clear that some ladies don't want to raise their babies, or aren't able to for some reason; and that's their decision to make, and it's not bad.

Adam was not consulted about this decision. He was a baby, so he couldn't talk or even really think. Still, he can't help feeling like he has lost out, like other people have decided he doesn't need something, without asking him about it. He loves his Papa and his Dad, and he wouldn't get rid of either of them for anything. But sometimes he just… wonders what having a mom around is like. Not *instead* of one of his dads, but maybe *alongside* them. Adam (sort of) remembers having one parent, and now he has two. Three wouldn't be entirely unreasonable, would it?

Adam is ten now. Maybe Marcia didn't think she could be a good mom when he was a baby, but that was ten whole years ago. She could have learned how to be, by now. Maybe one day she'll want to try again.

Adam doesn't have a mom, but he has a dad and a papa. And he's fine with that, really. But sometimes he wonders.

Adam is sixteen years old, and he doesn't have a mom. Most of the time, he's fine with that. He's got his papa and his dad, and he's happy with them. He doesn't really need anything else. His mother left him with his dad when he was born, and most of the time, that doesn't bother him.

Today, though, he's furious.

Prom is in a few days, and today they had an assembly of all the juniors and seniors. They all gathered in the gym to sit on the bleachers, squished uncomfortably close together, while their teachers talked to them for half an hour about why they shouldn't drink or have sex at or after prom. They didn't phrase it like that, but that was the gist of it. How they should make responsible choices. Not rush into anything they aren't ready for. Make good decisions and think about their futures.

They even show a video. It's, frankly, badly-produced, with choppy cuts, flat dialogue, and sappy, maudlin background music. It's supposedly a true story, about a girl who was their age, who drank wine and had sex with her date on prom night. And, naturally, her entire life fell apart. She got pregnant. Her boyfriend left her when he found out. Her parents were angry and kicked her out of the house. So the girl had to spend nine months in a special shelter for pregnant teenagers. Honestly, Adam is surprised they didn't throw an STD plotline in, just to really hammer the point home.

Throughout the story, there's interspersed little talking head interviews with the girl, her parents, and her teachers, all of whom express how disappointed they were with the girl, and how she had thrown away a bright, promising future, for a few minutes of physical pleasure. (Any similar condemnation of the girl's vanished ex-boyfriend, who also participated in the conception and would thus be logically presumed to have equally thrown his future away for pleasure, is notably absent).

Then the girl says, tearful but still oddly flat, *"I couldn't be a mother. I was sixteen and I made a drunk mistake. I couldn't take care of her the way she deserved. So I left her at the hospital, when she came. I knew she would find parents who would take care of her properly. I was just… the stork dropping her off for them."*

And it's like a long-lost piece in the puzzle of Adam's life clicks into place. As if hearing it from far away, he remembers his dad's voice, from a long time ago. *"She didn't think she could be a very good mommy, so when you were born, she gave you to me. She knew I would take care of you."*

Oh, Adam thinks, *I was a drunk mistake.*

When he gets home, he goes right to his parents' bedroom. This is Dad's early night, for classes, and he's not working a case with Uncle Jack right now, so he should be home. And Papa is still at his office, so there's no chance of Adam walking in on something he shouldn't. He doesn't knock. He's too angry to think of knocking. He couldn't explain, if someone asked, *why* he's so angry. He just needs to talk to his dad.

When the door bangs against the wall from how hard Adam shoves it open, Dad jumps so hard that he almost drops his laptop on the floor.

"Jesus Christ, Adam, what—-"

"Dad, did my mom drop me off for you like she was the fucking stork?" Interrupting people is bad, and he's never swore, which is also bad, in front of his dad before. But he's too upset to care.

Dad's eyes are really wide. Slowly, he closes his laptop. "Okay," He says, in that slow, soft voice he always uses when Adam is upset, "We're gonna talk about this now, huh?"

"Dad, answer me."

Dad sighs, scrubbing a hand over his face. "Why don't you sit down, honey?"

He's still not *answering the question!* Adam feels like his blood is bubbling under his skin, the way water does when Papa boils it on the stove. Like his anger is making his blood hot. The steam is going to make him pop right open. "I don't wanna sit down, I want to know."

"Adam, these kind of things are complicated—-"

"Just tell me if I'm a mistake!"

Adam doesn't mean to yell, but it comes out that way anyhow. His dad just looks at him for a long time. All of a sudden, he looks tired and old. Adam has never thought of his dad as old before.

"My baby," Dad says, and his voice cracks. There are tears in his eyes, tears that are there because of Adam, and Adam feels like the worst person in the world. "Oh, sweetheart, no. You're not a mistake. Your mom and I… neither of us was planning on having a baby. But that doesn't make you a mistake. C'mere."

He holds his arms open, and Adam goes, his vision blurring. He tucks himself against his dad's chest, and, wrapped in his arms, he suddenly feels very small.

"Can you look at me?" Dad asks gently, and Adam wants to make him happy, so he does. He can't quite meet his eyes, so he looks at Dad's nose. Dad cups Adam's chin in his hand. "Now, you listen good, okay? Mistakes are bad things, things we regret. So you have never, ever been a mistake. Not for a single second. You, Adam Robert Graham-Lecter, are the *best* thing that ever happened to me. Understand?"

"Why didn't she want me?" Adam doesn't recognize his own voice. It sounds tiny and weak and wobbly.

"I don't know," Dad answers, hugging Adam tight against him. It's like Adam's weighted blanket, but better, because it's warm and alive and Dad loves him.

When Papa gets home and finds Adam and Dad laying on the bed with tears on their cheeks, he doesn't ask any questions. He just lays down on Adam's other side and holds them both.

Adam is sixteen years old and he doesn't have a mom. His mom didn't want him. But his dad and papa do. And that's enough.

Adam is eighteen years old, and his mother wants to know him. Adam would like to know where the hell that desire was for the past eighteen years. He tries to make it clear that he doesn't want to talk to her, but she follows him home.

She says she wants to make sure Adam is being taken care of. As if she had worried about that at all when she left Adam on Dad's porch in the middle of the night. He knows his dad is a good man, who loves him and did his best to raise him, and would never, ever hurt him. But Marcia Raki had no way of knowing that, eighteen years ago. For all she knew, she could have left him with someone who would resent him, or neglect him, or hurt him! She couldn't have known, ahead of time, that Dad would treat Adam well. And she had apparently been perfectly fine leaving him and not knowing! She hadn't made a single effort to be involved in Adam's life up until Adam was already an adult.

That's not fair. You can't show up at the finish line at a race somebody else ran, and demand to get a medal because you walked a whole entire foot. It's just not fair. The night after Marcia first approached Adam at the observatory, he happened to overhear his fathers talking after they thought Adam had gone to bed.

*"Where was she?" Dad had hissed, a hoarse sort of whisper-scream, "How **dare** she want him now, when he doesn't need raising? All the hard work is done and she thinks she can waltz right in! Where was she when I **needed help?"***

"You did the best you could, my love," Papa replied gently, "The fact that Adam is a good person, worth wanting to know, is all due to your effort and care in raising him."

*"For five fucking years, I was terrified that me raising him on my own would fuck him up. I was so sure that I would ruin him, somehow. I was so **alone,** Hannibal…"*

Dad had been alone. Papa had stayed, had became the partner and parent Dad and Adam had needed. They had put in the work and the love to make Adam who he was. All Marcia had done was carry him and leave him.

She insults Papa, acting like he isn't a real parent to Adam just because they don't share blood. She makes excuses for herself by saying she was afraid to be a mother. But she became a mother again, later, she had more children and kept them. But still, she hadn't even tried to ever reach out to Adam. So she *was* able to be a mother, but just didn't bother to be one to Adam.

Adam thinks it must have been his fault. There must have been something wrong with him, even as a brand-new baby, that made her not want him. Papa makes Marcia leave. Papa is there. Papa has been there most of his life. Papa loves him. Adam doesn't need her. He has his dads.

Adam is eighteen years old and he doesn't have a mother. Maybe, one day, he'll be able to try again. He might be able to forgive her, eventually. He doesn't know right now, and that's okay. He has his dad and his papa, and that is all that matters.

Chapter End Notes

Some notes/thoughts:

1). Will reads Adam the original Winnie-the-Pooh stories by A.A. Milne, hence the dashes in Pooh's full name. I like to imagine that in that particular scene, they were on the original book's chapter seven, "In Which Kanga and Baby Roo Come to the Forest and Piglet has a Bath" (The introduction of Kanga, a mother character, which of course prompts Adam's question about his own mother).

2). Hamble, in the second segment of this chapter, is lowkey using pediatric therapy techniques on Adam, including art therapy and encouraging parallel play. Later on, when Adam joins Gabriel (pronounced the Spanish way, btw) in building his tower, he is moving on to cooperative play. As a friend in the FAD server pointed out, Adam's teacher would likely be thrilled about that progress.

3). Hannibal has been preparing to teach Adam about reproduction for years. He has books that are appropriate for children of any age that Adam might be when he eventually asked, from five to about thirteen. And, of course, his PowerPoint. Will could not be present for Adam's biology lesson, because his 70s, Deep South, abstinence-only sex ed was making him too embarrassed to be in the room. (Adam is horrified with Will for a few days, because he did all that gross stuff required to make a baby. It takes him a little longer to realize that Hannibal also has sex. When he realizes Hannibal has sex *with Will,* the poor kid almost dies of horror).

4). Adam describing Marcia leaving him with Will as "like the fucking stork dropped him off" is a reference to both Will and Beau using that phrase about it in previous chapters. There really was a "Pre-Prom Responsibility" assembly at my tiny rural school before prom weekend. All juniors and seniors had to attend, even if they weren't going to prom. At least two pregnancies that I know of resulted from the proms I had to go to assembly for. One couple was caught during the after-prom pool party, mid-handjob in the hot tub.

5). I imagine Will's little whispery rant to Hannibal in this last section delivered in the same tone as Molly Grue's *"Where have you been?"* speech in The Last Unicorn, if that helps you read it as intended at all. Will understands, in a way, why Marcia did the things she did. But that doesn't mean he can accept or forgive those actions. Marcia walked away, but Will didn't. And Will had Hannibal to help him eventually, but he spent a long time on his own and afraid. Marcia wasn't there when Will needed someone to help him raise their child, but she wants to have a relationship with the adult person Will raised. And even if he had no relationship with Marcia and didn't/doesn't want one, that must hurt.

6). I don't know if Adam would ever be ready to forgive/have a relationship with Marcia. He might, someday. If my absent parent suddenly approached me, I would probably just tell him to fuck off for the rest of my life. But I think Adam is a lot more of a good person than I am.

shopping

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The baby aisles of Target are a riot of colors and textures. Claire had been on her way to the home goods section, to buy some new curtains —— The new cat they'd adopted had shredded the hem of the living room ones —— but something had caught her eye as she passed the baby section. There's a man standing in the middle of one of the aisles, staring at his surroundings like a man barely holding his head above water.

In the child seat of the cart beside him is a baby carseat. The baby inside is very small. Likely very *new.*

"Hi," Claire says softly, approaching him. The man jumps a little, one hand flying out to rest on the carseat, as if to reassure himself that the baby is okay.

"Hey," The man is dark-haired and scruffy. He looks tired. His eyes are very blue.

"Is this your first?"

The man grimaces, rubbing the back of his neck with his free hand. "Is it that obvious?"

"You look a little overwhelmed," Claire says gently, "I remember that feeling from when my first was born."

The man exhales slowly. "I… wasn't expecting him. I didn't know his mom was pregnant."

Claire feels her eyebrows lift of their own accord. "Wow." So he's… totally unprepared, poor guy. No wonder he has no idea what to do.

"I didn't exactly have time to prepare," He says, "So now I'm…" He gestures around them, looking lost.

Claire has always been one to help people, and she likes to start with a plan. "Okay," She tells him, "Most of this stuff is just add-on bonuses to sell more products. Let's start with the basics. Are you planning on co-sleeping?"

"Um… I kind of don't know what that is?"

Oh, right. Totally unprepared. "It's when your baby sleeps in the same room as you, rather than in a different room."

"That sounds good, yeah." The man nods.

"Okay, so you'll probably want to start with one of these." Claire points him to a shelf of boxes, babies snoozing away adorably on the front. "They're called Moses baskets, you just set the stand up next to your bed, put the basket on top, and put the baby in the basket."

She shows him the brand she used for her own babies, and he puts one in his cart. The shift in weight from the box makes the baby in the carseat shift and whimper in his sleep a little, and the man immediately rushes to soothe him until he settles back down.

“How old is he?” Claire asks.

The man bites his lip. “Two days.”

Two days old, and he’s out in public. Not necessarily the best move, but this poor man is clearly flying solo and not well-informed. Claire’s babies had each spent the first month holed up at home, anything the family needed brought to them, rather than the other way around. Most babies at two days old would still be in the hospital. She wonders what happened to the baby’s mother, considers asking, and then decides it’s really none of her business.

She helps the man through picking out some more basics —— clothes and blankets and a bouncer and some toys —— before she feels confident that he can probably manage the rest on his own. Watching him study his options, and discuss them with his sleeping baby as though a two day old infant might have an opinion, she can’t help but think, *yeah, they’re gonna be okay.*

Hannibal, it should be noted, is fundamentally, ideologically opposed to even the concept of a Walmart. However, Will said that any port would do in a storm, and they were in a bit of a rush. Evidently, Adam had volunteered to bring party supplies for some sort of class event, and, in classic eight year old fashion, had forgotten to mention it to his fathers until the night before. And thus, here they are, wandering through a crowded superstore full of Sunday evening shoppers stocking up for the week. The moment he’d stepped inside, Hannibal been a little afraid he might have some sort of allergic reaction to just being in the place. Thankfully, he has not yet noticed any hives upon his person.

The wheels of their cart squeak gratingly. Between the squeaking wheels, the pop music being played on the speakers, and the inane chatter of the crowds, Hannibal almost envies Adam his beloved noise-cancelling headphones and sunglasses. The place is all concrete and florescent lights, and Hannibal feels like he might have to take a shower when they return home.

They are moving steadily towards an overhead sign labeled with **PARTIES & OCCASIONS** and a party hat emblem, when Adam tugs on Hannibal’s jacket to get his attention. “Where’s Daddy?”

Hannibal stops and glances around him. Will is nowhere in sight. Evidence, surely, of what a hellish place Walmart is, that it had distracted Hannibal enough for him to lose track of his own husband. He had been right beside them just a moment ago. Had he not?

“Will?” Hannibal calls, turning to look behind them.

“He couldn’t have gone far,” Adam says, hand still holding a fistful of Hannibal’s jacket.

“We must simply retrace our steps,” Hannibal agrees.

Adam takes a step backwards, without looking, and Hannibal sighs.

“My darling, I meant we need to turn around.”

“Oh,” Adam chirps, unfazed, “Okay.”

They turn the cart around, with much squeaking of wheels, and head back the way they had come.

“—- And the idea is to sleep near the baby, but if the baby is on your chest or in your bed, you have to stay awake, because you can’t risk rolling onto the baby and squishing them. So if you’re co-sleeping and you want to actually sleep, the best thing is to move the baby into their crib or basket. But it’s still considered co-sleeping, ‘cause Baby is in the same room.”

Hannibal backs up a little, following the sound of his beloved’s voice. Will is in the middle of the baby section, earnestly explaining something to a young couple. He’s apparently aiding them with something, because he’s currently in the process of helping the man load something into a cart.

“So, theoretically the baby sleeps with us, meaning in the same room, but shouldn’t actually sleep in the same bed?” The young woman asks.

Will nods. “Exactly. The baby can sleep in your bed, but only if y’all are still awake to keep an eye on them.”

Abruptly, Adam releases his grip on Hannibal’s clothes and darts forward, ducking under Will’s arm and pressing himself to his father’s side.

Will chuckles, glancing down at him and squeezing him gently. “Hey, buddy. Where’s Papa?” He looks over his shoulder and smiles when he sees Hannibal standing at the end of the aisle. “There you are. Hi, hon.”

Hannibal smiles back, an odd sort of warmth in his chest at Will casually using an endearment for him in public. “You have gotten distracted, my love.”

Will nods, a little sheepish, rubbing the back of his neck with his hand. “They’re getting their first foster placement tomorrow. Emergency placement, so short-notice, obviously, and they were a little overwhelmed with finding stuff they need for the baby.”

He says it as though that explains everything. Hannibal supposes that, for Will, it does. He saw people in need of help, and he stepped in. Even with his darker urges embraced, even as a man who killed with Hannibal and enjoyed the hunt, he still felt compelled to help those who needed assistance. It is a self-contained juxtaposition within him, which is one of many reasons Hannibal loves him.

Once the three of them are back in the car, party supplies procured, Adam pipes up. “Daddy, why did you help those people?”

Will turns in his seat to look back at him, something soft and wistful in his expression. “Because when you were a baby, someone did the same for me.”

Chapter End Notes

Claire is named after Hugh Dancy's irl wife. I thought it would be cute. Also, I'm fairly certain if Hannibal ever set foot in a Walmart, he would burst into flame like a vampire stepping into a church.

growing

Chapter Notes

Happy Father's Day from the Graham-Lecters...

(Possible TWs: Brief mentions of parental abandonment, parental neglect, alcoholism, parental death, IVF, and surrogacy, in case any of that bothers you)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"We still haven't decided what we'd like her to call us," Hannibal muses one night. They're relaxing in the study with some wine after dinner, for once not side by side on the couch, but instead by the fire, in two chairs facing one another. For old times' sake.

Will raises an eyebrow, watching his husband. His hair is all salt now, devoid of pepper, and the lines of his face are deeper, but he's still just as striking as he had been, all those years ago in Jack's office. Will doesn't ask who Hannibal is referring to. There's only one *her* in their lives that Hannibal's comment would pertain to.

"She isn't even born yet, Hannibal. She won't be really talking until… roughly a year or so after that. We have time."

Adam and Nigel had told the two of them they could choose what they'd like their yet-unborn granddaughter to call them. Hannibal, apparently, has been pondering it.

Hannibal takes a sip of his wine, a thoughtful air about him. "Nigel asked me about it today."

Will is thankful he hadn't been taking a drink when Hannibal spoke, or he might have choked. While the relationship between his husband and his son-in-law was now vastly improved from the way it had been when they met (stony disapproval on one end and fiery teenage defiance on the other), it still came as a bit of a surprise that Nigel would be reaching out to contact Hannibal specifically, rather than Hannibal-and-Will as a unit. "What did he say?"

"He asked if we had chosen names for ourselves yet. Apparently, Adam is struggling with his."

Will frowns, looking down into his glass as if the rich red wine was some kind of divination tool that would give him answers. "I thought he'd decided on Dad."

Hannibal's lips curve up into a smile, fondness clear in his expression. "He had. It seems that, today, he realized that Dad is what he calls you, and he worries that if the baby calls *him* Dad, but hears him calling *you* Dad, she might become confused."

Will can't help the laughter that spills from him. Only Adam would think of something as minor and hypothetical as that and worry over it. His sweet boy, always thoughtful and serious no matter what. Will loves him more and more with every second. He'd loved the baby he found unexpectedly on his porch, loved the squirming toddler and the inquisitive child. He might have thought whimsically about strangling the headstrong, stubborn teenager, but Will had loved him, too, had watched with awe and adoration as he grew into a young man. He had loved every single iteration of Adam that had ever existed. Being able to raise him, to see him become the person he was meant to be, had been the greatest joy and honor of Will's life. Witnessing him transform into a father would, he was sure, be just as wonderful as the rest of it had been.

"Nigel's still settled on Tati, right?" Will asks, just to be sure.

Hannibal nods. "That is the Romanian equivalent for Dad or Daddy, so his choice came naturally to him." He pauses to take another sip, and then adds, "And because I can hear the cogs in your brain whirring, the Lithuanian word for grandfather is *senelis."*

"No," Will decides immediately, "That just makes me think of the word *senile.* Ugh."

"Indeed," Hannibal agrees wryly. "I briefly considered having her call me by the Lithuanian version of Dad, but that is *Tėtis,* and I fear that would sound similar enough to Tati that it may confuse her."

They don't use their coming granddaughter's name. They don't know what it is. Her fathers had insisted they wanted to keep it a surprise until she arrived, and so she yet remains *the baby.*

Mentally, Will rifles through the various nicknames for paternal figures that he knows. Adam had called Will's dad, the only grandparent he ever knew, Pappaw. It feels wrong for Will to use that, like he's taking something away from his father. Like how, for the first few years of his adulthood, he had looked around for Beau every time he heard *Mr. Graham.* Papa is acceptable for fathers and grandfathers, but that is what Adam calls Hannibal, and so would likely encounter a similar problem to the one Adam is worrying over with the name Dad. Still, the thought gives him an idea. For a joke, at least, if not a viable option.

"You could always go with a classic," He suggests, hiding his smile behind the rim of his glass, "have her call you Hamble."

Hannibal chuckles at that, a particular warmth and tenderness in his eyes that only appears there in relation to their son. His smile turns wistful. "That was so long ago now. Do you think he even remembers that he used to call me something other than Papa?"

"I haven't asked him about it, maybe you should," Will retorts. "I actually don't know how much he remembers from back then. I've never thought to ask. You've been part of his life for so long, you might just always be *Papa* in his memories. He might not even remember life without you."

"Until I met the two of you," Hannibal says, meeting Will's eyes and holding his gaze, "I always lived in the moment. I never thought about the future. But then you came along, and

Adam with you, and suddenly, I could see a future. With you, the both of you. And I wanted it so badly that I was frightened. You both slipped through a crack in my armor to the heart of me and made yourselves at home there."

Will isn't sure what exactly the correct response is to such a statement, so he falls back on his own personal Ol' Reliable: Humor. "Goddamn, Doctor Lecter, we've been married almost three decades now. You don't have to keep trying to sweep me off my feet with grand declarations of love."

Hannibal's lips twitch in that particular way that Will knows means his husband is fighting back a smile. "You are a menace," Hannibal replies, slow and deliberate, "sent to this earth to plague me. Every morning, I wonder what pestering you will see fit to inflict upon me this day."

"Oh, baby, you know I love it when you talk dirty to me."

Hannibal cracks, shoulders shaking with the force of his laughter.

Will considers their possible options, waiting until Hannibal is done laughing to ask, "What did you call your grandfathers?" Somehow, they have never discussed that, despite how basic it seems.

Hannibal takes another sip of his wine. "I never knew either set of grandparents, but traditionally, I assume I would have called them *senelis* and *nonno."*

"Nonno isn't too bad," Will muses, "But not everyone in this family speaks Italian."

"What about your grandfathers?" Hannibal asks.

"Never met my mother's parents," Will makes a sardonic little salute with his glass to the memory of people who had never wanted to know him. "And my dad's dad was dead before I came along. I called Dad's mom Meemaw, but that's definitely not an option."

"I think you would make an excellent Meemaw."

"You're lucky I have nothing to throw at you, mister."

Hannibal smirks. "It's *doctor,* actually."

"Should she call you that?" Will snorts, "Whatever she calls me, and then *Doctor Lecter?"*

"You are incorrigible, *mylimasis."* But despite his chiding, Hannibal leans over to kiss him; and even though they're months away from being grandfathers, it still drives Will crazy.

(Adam eventually decides to go with Dad anyway, hoping that, if any confusion arises, he can explain to his daughter the difference between *his* dad and *her* dad).

They help Adam and Nigel decorate the baby's room. The boys have decided on a soft, minty green for the walls, and Hannibal helps Adam paint them. Fussy though both of them

can be, they both wind up with smears of green on their plastic coveralls and across their faces. Neither of them complain, and they both laugh a lot.

Will and Nigel build a crib. Not putting together some parts from an IKEA kit, but actually building the entire thing by hand, from old, dark-stained wood. They talk a lot, about anything that comes into their heads. Nigel asks a lot of questions, questions that Will knows Nigel can't ask his own father. So Will is the closest thing he has.

"What if I fuck her up?" Nigel asks one day as the two of them apply waterproof sealant to the wood they plan to use. The way he says it, half-mumbled and rushed, and the way he fixedly stares down at the wood tells Will that the question is something he's been thinking about for a while.

"You think I knew what the hell I was doing when Adam showed up?" Will snorts. "You'll figure it out, Ni."

"I'm serious," Nigel insists.

"So am I," Will retorts, "Nobody really knows what they're doing. Even if you do all the planning in the world, you still never feel ready when that kid is in your arms."

"You know what my parents are like," Nigel says glumly, "I just don't want to end up like my dad."

Will softens. "I was born in the same kind of situation, y'know. Parents got hitched 'cause I was on the way and, back in those days, that's what they *had* to do. My mom walked out when I was two."

Nigel stops and looks at him, hands falling still.

"So I get it," Will continues, "I get being scared you're gonna mess your kid up. Especially being scared that you're gonna fuck up because of the way you were raised. You think, *How the hell am I supposed to raise a child when I wasn't even a wanted child? I have no idea how to be a good parent, my parents fucked me up royally."*

Nigel nods, eyes huge.

"That's the same thing I thought when I found Adam on my porch. My dad loved me, but he had no idea how to raise a kid. Back in those days, men didn't do that. But he was on his own. He did the best he could. I know that, but he was so busy working his ass off that he didn't have much time or energy for me. I basically raised myself. So when Adam showed up, I was scared as hell."

Nigel looks down again, focusing on carefully putting the sealant on. "How'd you manage?"

"I told myself that no matter what happened, I was always gonna have time for Adam. My dad spent my childhood working to provide for me and getting hammered to forget his heartache a little while when he wasn't working." Will closes his eyes. For a second, he's fourteen again, draping his jacket over his dad because Beau had passed out in a recliner,

gently prying a half-empty Bud Light can from his hand. "I knew he cared, but I never felt like I was a priority. His work and his drinking were his priorities. So I made sure, every goddamn day, that Adam was my priority."

"My parents filed for divorce the day after I turned eighteen," Nigel says on a slow exhale. "The whole time I was growing up, they argued all the time. Every day, there was a screaming match. I've known all my life I was the only reason they got married. They hated each other, and I felt like they hated me, 'cause I was the reason they got stuck together. How am I supposed to be a good parent when I have no idea what one looks like?"

"You're gonna be a good parent because you know what it's like to have parents that aren't good." Will says firmly, "You don't ever want your little girl to feel what your parents made you feel, right?"

"Never," Nigel shakes his head.

"So you do everything you can to be the opposite of your folks. And that will be enough."

Nigel's eyes are suspiciously shiny, but he clears his throat loudly and goes back to his work. His sandy hair flops over his forehead, and Will fights the urge to push it back. Nigel is stubborn and prickly and a bit of an asshole sometimes, but Adam loves him, and Will loves him for making Adam happy. (And because Nigel needs at least one parent to love him, and since his parents don't seem up to the task, Will would do it instead.)

Will lets the subject drop.

A few weeks later, out of the blue, Nigel asks, "Did things ever get better with your dad?"

Will, working on screwing dowel rods into the frame that will go at the crib's front, hums in response. "We kind of fell outta touch for a while. Calls here and there, but… he felt guilty about the way I grew up, and he was scared of the way my empathy let me understand him. So he avoided me a long time. He didn't even know about Adam until Adam was six. But once he found out, he turned out to be a much better grandpa than he was a dad. Stopped pickling his liver when the doctor told him he wouldn't see Adam's teen years if he didn't stop."

"So that's good, right?"

"My mom walked out on both of us when I was two, but he loved her until the day he died. We were with him when he went, me and Adam, but the last thing he ever said was my mother's name." Will manages a half-hearted, ironic smile. "Even at the end, I wasn't his priority."

They're just getting started making dinner —- Meaning Hannibal cooking and Will sitting at the kitchen island and occasionally providing witty commentary —- when Will gets a text from Adam: *It's happening.*

"Well," Will says when he reads it, "It's time."

“Do you want to go at the hospital?” Hannibal asks, in the middle of dicing an onion. “We would just be sitting around with nothing useful to do.”

Will bites his lip. “What if the boys need us?”

They go to the hospital.

They sit in the small waiting room outside the labor and delivery ward for what feels like centuries, holding hands to settle the nerves that well up despite all their rationality. They talk quietly, about little things —- The latest news from Abigail, away in Australia for her wildlife photography work. The plans they had made for dinner, which must now be rethought. What their dogs might be doing while home alone. Mostly, though, they talk about memories.

They have been together so long, all their memories are old ones, now. All old stories both of them have either lived through or heard before. Still, they tell them again, love and time and the significant circumstance giving them fresh meaning.

The vast majority of the memories they bring up are about Adam. Of course.

Will tells the story of how he opened his door one day to find a tiny intruder asleep on his porch. (*“Like the fucking stork dropped him off,”* Hannibal supplies, knowingly, at just the right moment. He has heard the story so many times now as to know that particular turn of phrase Will uses by heart).

Hannibal recounts the tale of the first time he met Adam, and the boy who would become his son refused to make a peep because he wasn’t supposed to talk to strangers. How, the first time Adam’s attempt at his name had christened him *Hamble,* he had thought of Mischa and his heart had been softened. “It was as if, ever since Mischa, there had been a layer of ice between myself and the world. It kept me apart from everything, including emotion, and I was quite content that way. Meeting you cracked the ice. Meeting Adam began to melt it.”

Shortly after ten-thirty at night, a nurse emerges from the big metal door to the ward to tell them that their granddaughter has been born and their son is asking to see them.

When Will and Hannibal reach him, Adam is sitting in the hallway, in a folding chair. In his arms is a small bundle of blankets, and Will thinks his heart might skip a beat when he sees it. Adam is looking down at that tiny new life with an expression of mingled wonder and worry. It makes Will’s heart ache, but in the best possible way. This is one anxiety he cannot soothe for Adam, but for a very good reason.

Their son is so enraptured that he doesn’t even seem to notice them approach. Without consulting with each other, Will and Hannibal both crouch down in front of him —- Will’s knees protest vigorously, as he’s sure Hannibal’s do —- to place themselves lower than Adam, so as to not startle him when he does notice. And it has the added bonus of placing them both closer to the newest member of their family.

“Where is Nigel, my love?” Hannibal asks softly.

Adam doesn't even look up, apparently unfazed. "In there with Katie still," He says, his usually-soft voice barely louder than a whisper. A smile crosses his face as he mentions their surrogate, a woman from D.C., who has become a friend to the boys over the duration of her carrying their child. "She was amazing. It was all amazing. Scary, but amazing."

It abruptly occurs to Will that, of the three of them, Adam is the only one who has been present at their child's birth. He wonders how that should make him feel before becoming distracted by the life-changing novelty of the thought that Adam has a child of his own now. *Adam! Their little boy, Will's lamb, Hannibal's star, is a father now!*

Adam, oblivious to his dad's thoughts, continues, "I'm glad Ni is with her, she was the one doing all the hard work, and she did so good. She should have someone looking after her. But it was getting very crowded in there, on top of all the noise, and it was stressing me out. So they sent me out here. With her."

Finally, he lifts his gaze from his newborn child. He meets Will's eyes, actually makes direct eye-contact for once. Will just looks back at him, knowing his son is seeking something from him but unsure of exactly what.

"How are you feeling?" Hannibal murmurs, and it's *such* a therapist question that Will has to valiantly resist the urge to elbow him.

All the wonder in Adam's face falls away, leaving only the worry. "Terrified," He whispers.

You're lucky, Will wants to say, *you knew this was coming ahead of time.* After all, it had taken even longer than the usual nine months for Adam and Nigel to end up with this baby. Once they decided they wanted one, they needed to find a surrogate, and do the IVF treatments, and all the various mountains of paperwork that came with every step in the process of two queer people, who could not manage it the usual way, actually wanting a child.

Will is suddenly reminded of Hannibal's long-ago PowerPoint presentation he'd made for Adam about sexual reproduction. *It's so easy for straight people,* he thinks, *Just stick it in a few times and voilà. I wasn't even sober.* Hannibal's adoption of Adam, however, had required some legal hoop-jumping. Some people had even made quiet grumblings about the whole thing just because Will and Hannibal were both men, rare though those people were. For their boys, the red tape and obstacles of surrogacy were even more complex.

Still, none of that is what Adam needs to hear right now. What Adam had been searching for in Will's eyes was reassurance, and Will gives it gladly.

"You look scared shitless," he says, "But I think every new parent does. I know I was." He raises himself up a little, enough for him to press a kiss to Adam's forehead. He might be a father himself, now, but that doesn't stop him from still being Will's baby.

Adam leans into the affectionate gesture with a little sigh. Between their bodies, the little bundle wriggles. "Oh!" Adam gasps immediately, ducking his head to peer down at her, "Were we squishing you, honey? I'm sorry."

He shifts the baby a little in his arms, and Will and Hannibal get their first look at her. She is, of course, only a few minutes old. Still pink and a little lumpy from the pressure of being born. Squishy and rather potato-like in appearance. Still, she is brand-new and she is theirs, and that alone makes her beautiful.

The egg that became her was fertilized with a mix of samples from Nigel and Adam. They don't know which of them is her biological father, and both of them have been adamant that they don't want to find out. It may become apparent, as she grows up, but until and unless that happens, they are content not knowing.

"It doesn't matter to us. All of us know DNA isn't the only thing that makes a family," Adam had said to Will and Hannibal when he and Nigel had explained the decision. He'd been looking at Hannibal when he said it, and Hannibal had squeezed Will's hand so hard it hurt.

"Hello, sweetheart," Will croons, "We've all been waiting a long time to meet you."

Hannibal reaches out and gently brushes a finger along her round little cheek. "Welcome to the world, *ma petite chérie."*

Their granddaughter looks up —- Not *at* them, exactly, her newborn-colorless eyes still unfocused, but looking in the direction of their voices.

"So, for her name, we took turns," Adam says, "I picked one name and Ni picked the other. I got the first name, 'cause I won at rock-paper-scissors."

Will muffles his laugh behind a hand. For Nigel and Adam to leave the choosing of their child's first name to winning or losing a game is so quintessentially *them* that it's adorable.

"Then what will we be calling this lovely lady?" Hannibal asks.

Adam is looking down at his daughter again, like his eyes are drawn to her by gravity. As if the universe has shifted to place *her* at the center rather than the sun. Will remembers how that feels, the sudden conviction that nothing in the world could ever matter more than the tiny, fragile life in his arms. To watch that change happen for his own precious baby feels like getting to witness something holy.

"Stella Marioara Graham-Lecter," Adam tells them, slow and reverent. "Stella… well, you can figure out where that one came from." He smiles, a little sheepish. "And Marioara… Nigel chose that one 'cause it means *wished-for child."*

Will and Hannibal look at each other, both of them smiling through the tears in their eyes.

"It's beautiful," Will tells him.

In the end, Hannibal decides he wants to be called *Papé,* a French affectionate term for a grandfather. French, after all, was something both he and Will had taught to Adam, and Hannibal speaks to Stella in all his various languages. She's already going to be speaking English and Romanian, so adding in French doesn't seem like much trouble.

Will decides that he doesn't want to decide. He figures that Stella will call him something, no matter what, so it might as well be her to choose what that is. That backfires on him when little Stella starts calling him *Mee-mas.*

At first, they aren't sure that's what she's calling him. They don't know what the hell it means, so it's hard to determine that it's referring to Will, specifically. But, eventually, it becomes clear that "Mee-mas" is her way of addressing him.

"Hey, *steluță*, do you know who that is?" Nigel asks a few weeks after it starts, pointing to Will.

"Mee-mas!" Stella crows, reaching her chubby baby arms out towards Will.

"I wonder why she calls you that," Adam wonders, "We have no idea where it came from."

"It feels uncomfortably close to Meemaw," Will grouches, only half serious, as he takes Stella from Nigel and bounces her on his lap, "I feel like I should object on principle."

"I did say that you would make a good one, *mylimasis,"* Hannibal teases, eyes shining as he lets Stella grab at his fingers.

The moment the Lithuanian endearment leaves her papé's lips, Stella's face lights up. "Mee-mas," She agrees eagerly, nodding at Hannibal and patting Will's face for emphasis. "Mee-mas!"

"… Oh my God," Nigel wheezes, bursting into laughter.

Next to him, Adam is giggling. "She heard Papa call you *mylimasis* so much that she think it's your name!"

Will looks his beaming husband directly in the eye and says, "You're lucky I'm holding a baby and not something I can throw at you, *Doctor."*

Chapter End Notes

... All of them!

@EmoVamp0620 on Twit asked about Hannigram as grandparents in this verse, and I couldn't get it out of my head, so... hi! This one's for you! 👋

Mylimasis: Lithuanian for "beloved"

Ma petite chérie: French for "my little love/darling/sweetheart" (*chérie* is a general endearment)

Steluță: Romanian for "little star"

an incident

Chapter Notes

> TWS for this chapter: Violence (not depicted, but we see a character with a bloody lip and a black eye), homophobia and discrimination towards nontraditional family structures. References to homophobic language (a character uses a slur but the slur itself is not printed in the text) and pedophilia (the same character implies that queer men are pedophiles).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal's Bentley does not belong in a parking lot full of SUVs and station wagons. Despite that, he shifts it into park and unbuckles quickly. He heads towards the entrance —- *CLAREMONT MIDDLE SCHOOL* emblazoned above it —- at a rapid pace. If he were observing anyone else, Hannibal would say that person was rushing. But Hannibal Lecter does not rush.

Still he can't help the urgency he feels, his mind filled with thoughts of the phone call he'd received. There had been an incident, he was told, involving his son, and the school required one of Adam's parents to come in to meet with the principal immediately. They had refused to give him any further information. As Will was unavailable, Hannibal had been obliged to hurriedly cancel his afternoon appointments and head to the school.

The first set of doors is unlocked and he simply walks through them. The second set, however, is locked. Off to the side, on the wall beside the doors, is a gray box with a small camera and speaker system, including a hidden microphone. Hannibal, knowing the required routine, presses the button on the box.

"Dr. Hannibal Lecter," He says enunciating even more carefully than usual to compensate for his accent, "I am here about my son, Adam Graham-Lecter."

The intercom gives a buzz, and a feminine voice replies, static-filled, "Come on in, Dr. Lecter."

When he reaches the office, the secretary motions him down a little hallway to the back of the office. "Second door, sir." The expression on her face is odd, as though she is unhappy but unable to express it.

When Hannibal opens the second door in the small hallway, he's almost immediately met with a shaking, tearful twelve-year-old flinging his arms around Hannibal. "Papa," Adam whimpers into the fabric of Hannibal's maroon suit jacket.

"Sweet boy," Hannibal murmurs in French, running a hand through Adam's curls. *"What happened?"* When Adam only sniffles in reply, Hannibal gently takes him by the shoulders,

moving him back a little so Hannibal can get a look at him. And he's immediately filled with fury.

Because Adam's bottom lip is split, bleeding sluggishly, and there is swelling around his left eye that Hannibal is certain is developing into a bruise as they stand there.

"What happened?" Hannibal asks again, this time in English, as his hands gently cup his son's face.

Adam only shakes his head.

A pointed throat-clearing. When Hannibal looks away from Adam, the principal is watching them from behind his desk. "Mr. Graham, thank you for coming in so quickly," he says, voice smooth and cold as a mirror.

"Dr. Lecter, actually," Hannibal replies smoothly, wrapping an arm around Adam's shoulders to hold his boy close as he turns to face the other man. "I'm afraid Special Agent Graham is away just now, working with the Behavioral Analysis Unit of the FBI."

The principal —- The nameplate on his desk reads *Mr. Krendler* —- narrows his eyes at the subtle emphasis Hannibal places on Will's actual title.

"Would you care to inform me, Mr. Krendler, why the child my husband and I entrusted into your care this morning is now bruised and bleeding?" Hannibal asks.

"As I'm sure you were told on the phone, there was an incident," Mr. Krendler tells him, maddeningly polite, "between Adam and another student."

"A physical altercation is rather more significant than a simple incident. What caused it?"

Mr. Krendler's smile is like an oil spill, slick and unpleasant. "That's part of the issue. We have footage from the school cameras proving that Adam threw the first punch. And as he refuses to explain himself and the other student involved claims that he was attacked unprovoked, we find ourselves in a bit of a sticky situation." His eyes, when they land on Adam's bowed head, are cold.

Hannibal looks down at his still-sniffling son, tucked into Hannibal's side as though he could make himself disappear entirely. Carefully, Hannibal pries Adam's grip off him and guides the boy to sit in a provided chair, placing himself between Adam and the desk. Adam can no longer see Krendler, only Hannibal, bending down to his level.

"My darling," Hannibal says in French, *"Forget about him. Forget about being in trouble. Just talk to me. Tell your old papa what happened."*

Adam nods, lips trembling. Just as he starts to open his mouth, Hannibal interjects.

"In English, please, so that the rude man over there understands."

"Eddie…" Adam begins and Hannibal has a bad feeling that he knows where this is going. They had gone to the principal of Adam's elementary school about Eddie Lane's behavior

towards Adam, but apparently he had started up again since they'd moved to the middle school. "He's been acting weird to me again lately. I know you told me to ignore people who are mean to me, Papa, but it wasn't me he was being mean to."

"What do you mean, Adam?" Hannibal asks gently.

Adam sniffs, wiping tears from his eyes and wincing when he touches the sore skin near his eye. "It was you he was being mean to, you and Dad. He said… he said…" His eyes, dark and wild as an ocean at the moment, are welling with fresh tears in his distress.

"If you would get to the point, Adam?" Krendler chimes in snidely. Hannibal resists the urge to snap at him through sheer self-control.

"He said that he didn't know why anybody let you and Dad have me. That people like you and Dad shouldn't be allowed around kids. He called… He called you…" Adam swallows hard and forces the word out. A nasty, provocative, *unspeakably rude* word.

Hannibal sighs, kissing Adam's forehead to reassure him before standing back up and turning to face the principal. Krendler is watching them, his expression carefully blank.

"So," Hannibal says, voice even and commanding, "Is that the kind of language you tolerate in your school, Mr. Krendler? Because my son has had problems with Edward Lane and his comments towards our family before."

"Whatever Eddie may or may not have said is irrelevant," Krendler answers. "As Adam is the one who escalated to violence."

"I would hardly say that provocation is irrelevant," Hannibal argues, "Adam did not simply strike another child for no reason, he was retaliating against aspersions cast on his parents' character."

"According to Adam. Eddie's claim is that Adam attacked him out of nowhere. And our cameras have no sound, so all we have is Adam's word that Eddie allegedly said anything."

Hannibal lifts his chin a little higher, metaphorical hackles raised. "Mr. Krendler, are you calling my son a liar?"

"I am simply stating that it's Adam's word against Eddie's, and that Adam is the one who threw the first punch." Krendler's voice is silky-smooth but his tone is patronizing. "A bit of a *he said-she said* situation. Or, rather, *he said-he said,* in this case. Not the usual turn of phrase, you know, a bit irregular. Abnormal, one might say."

Hannibal takes a moment to observe the other man, wondering if he could actually be insinuating what Hannibal thinks he is. Then he catches the subtle smirk on Krendler's lips and realizes that *yes, yes he is.*

"Now," Krendler clears his throat, apparently taking Hannibal's silence as him conceding, "As our school has a zero-tolerance policy for fighting, Adam will be suspended for the rest of the week."

Behind Hannibal, Adam's breath hitches. He's never gotten so much as a write-up before, much less a suspension.

"And what is your policy for discrimination?" Hannibal asks pointedly, "Edward Lane has a history of harassing Adam with homophobic language in the past, and I'm inclined to believe my son when he says that he was provoked by yet another insult."

"As I've told you, Mr. Lecter, we have no solid proof that Eddie said anything to Adam and even if he had—-"

"It's *Doctor* Lecter, as I've told *you,"* Hannibal cuts him off, voice hard and cold as ice, "And I will thank you, *Mister* Krendler, to not imply again that my son would lie. I'd ask you to think very seriously about your school's anti-discrimination policy, because I happen to have the means with which to bring a *very* costly, very *public* legal case against your school on the grounds of homophobic treatment towards my family. If I were you, I would avoid giving me the motivation to do so."

That said, he turns his back on the odious man. "Come along, Adam."

Krendler does not protest as they exit.

In the main part of the office, apparently waiting for them, is a man in a flannel shirt, with silver threaded through his sandy hair, and an open, approachable demeanor. "How are you doing, Adam?" He asks kindly as soon as they leave the principal's office. Then, he adds in Hannibal's direction, "Martin Andersen, sir, I'm Adam's history teacher."

Hannibal shakes his hand, to be polite, and Mr. Andersen turns back to Adam. "Are you alright?"

"Got suspended," Adam mumbles, staring down at his shoes. He stands slightly pigeon-toed, an endearing quirk.

"I didn't ask what discipline you got, I asked if you were okay." Mr. Andersen replies, but gently. "Did you tell Mr. Krendler what Eddie said to you?"

"You heard what he said?" Hannibal asks.

Mr. Andersen nods. "It happened right outside my classroom door, I saw and heard the whole thing."

"Mr. Krendler said there's no way to prove Eddie said it," Adam lifts his head, "And since I started hitting, it's all my fault anyway."

"He said it," Mr. Andersen's lips are pressed into a thin line. "Loud and clear. I heard it, and so did Ms. Moore across the hall. I can't say I approve of what you did, Adam, but I understand why you did it." He bends down a little to look into Adam's face on his level and says, conspiratorially, "If someone my age said something that awful about *my* parents, I'd probably hit them too."

“We appreciate your support,” Hannibal tells him, “And I’m sure my husband would as well. Mr. Krendler… may have implied that Adam was lying. But, paradoxically, that he might agree with Eddie’s sentiments.”

The look Adam shoots Hannibal makes it clear that his son hadn’t picked up on *that* particular nuance of the confrontation. The secretary sitting behind the desk has a hand over her mouth, and Mr. Andersen looks outright mutinous.

“I’ll talk to him and tell him I heard Eddie insult you,” Mr. Andersen says firmly, “Then I’ll talk to the board. That kind of nonsense is unacceptable.”

“He told Wally Foster-McClane’s moms last week that he couldn’t do anything about someone leaving notes calling them rude names in Wally’s locker,” the secretary points out, “So there’s now a pattern of behavior. Repeatedly doing nothing about students with same-sex parents being harassed.”

Adam tugs on Hannibal’s sleeve, an old habit from childhood, when he wanted to interject in a conversation. “My friend Gabe has been having trouble too. He has three parents, and other kids are weird about it. His papi told him Mr. Krendler said their *strange situation* confuses people.”

When they’re in the Bentley, Hannibal waits until Adam has buckled his seatbelt to say, “What would you like to do today, *mielasis?”*

Adam looks up at him, eyes wide. “I’m not in trouble? Even though I got suspended?”

“I would never punish you, sweet boy, for defending your father and myself from such vile accusations. I was instructed to remove you from the school grounds, but no one can control what I choose to do with you after that. Now, as you and I are going to be spending the rest of the day together, what would you like to do?”

They spend their afternoon getting ice cream —- chocolate chip cookie dough for Adam and chocolate-vanilla twist for Hannibal —- and visiting the Maryland Science Center in Baltimore.

By the end of that nine week grading period, Paul Krendler is no longer the principal of Claremont Middle School. Hannibal puts Krendler’s information in his Rolodex.

Chapter End Notes

Mielasis: Lithuanian for dear/darling/sweetheart. A general endearment, similar to *“chérie”* in French.

Claremont Middle School is named after President Ellen Claremont from *Red, White, and Royal Blue,* another fandom I enjoy. I haven’t decided whether the Hambleverse

takes place within the RWRB universe, where Ellen Claremont won the 2016 and 2020 elections, or if it's just a fun little shout-out.

Paul Krendler is borrowed from the Hannibal novels, where he is Clarice's misogynistic boss. (From what I can tell, I haven't gotten there in my read-through yet). I'm pretty sure Hannibal eats his brain, so that's fun.

Adam's history teacher is Martin from Another Round. He doesn't have an official surname in his canon, so I looked up a list of Danish surnames and picked one at random. Eddie Lane is the main character from "The Path", where he has a lot of conflict with Hugh's character. I've mentioned him as a bully to Adam before. The mentioned Ms. Moore is named after Julianne Moore, who played Clarice in the movie adaptation of "Hannibal" (and also played a character who slept with Hugh's character in "Savage Grace", so technically Will and Clarice have fucked in one alternate universe!)

The Maryland Science Center is a real place in Baltimore. Their observatory is only open on sunny Saturdays, during specific hours, but they have a lot of other exhibits, including a planetarium. So I'm sure Adam would enjoy it even on a weekday.

I think I made the implication clear enough, but in case anyone wasn't sure and was unbearably curious as to what was actually said, Eddie called Will and Hannibal the f word.

… Man, this feels like a lot of notes.

hambleween

Chapter Notes

New username, who dis?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal has never given much thought to Halloween. It wasn't a holiday that was celebrated in Lithuania. His homeland's autumnal festival took place on the second of November, and had more to do with remembering and venerating one's forebears than with traipsing from house to house and begging strangers for sweets. Hannibal has not celebrated *Vėlinės* since that terrible winter when Mischa and his parents had been stolen from him. Hannibal had enough ghosts without inviting his ancestors to his table. So Hannibal has never given Halloween more than a passing moment of consideration.

That is, until Will pauses, halfway out the door after their latest date night, turns back, and says, "By the way, Adam wanted to invite you to go trick-or-treating with us."

"Did he?"

Will offers him a lopsided sort of half-smile. "Not many neighbors in Wolf Trap, so we usually drive somewhere with actual neighborhoods to trick-or-treat. We were thinking of hitting somewhere in Baltimore this year, and he asked if you could come along."

Hannibal has never celebrated Halloween. But this is Adam, and Will, and lately Hannibal has felt inclined to do anything they ask.

"I would be honored to accompany you."

A few days later, Hannibal opens his door and a small body immediately collides with his legs. "Hi!" Adam's voice chirps, child-high and bright with enthusiasm. Something plastic bangs against Hannibal's shin with a hollow *thwack.*

"Someone is very excited," Will informs him in a stage-whisper. He's looking at his son with that particular softness in his gaze that Hannibal has come to understand belongs solely to Adam.

Then Adam steps back, letting Hannibal get a better look at him. A plastic bucket shaped like a grinning orange jack-o-lantern dangles from one of his hands. He's dressed in a suit, dark brown with a checkered pattern of light brown lines, with a light brown tie. His curls are slicked back, flattened with gel. "Look, Hamble!" He giggles, grinning widely, "I'm you!"

There is an odd feeling in Hannibal's chest, as though someone has reached between his ribs, seized his heart, and twisted. "I see," he replies softly. He looks down at himself — Coincidentally, he's wearing a similar ensemble, but in a navy blue, with checkered lines in a lighter blue and a navy tie.

"C'mon," Adam tugs on his hand. "We gotta go before all the good candy's gone."

"Lead the way, Dr. Lecter," Hannibal tells him with a wink. Adam laughs.

Will has a small tote bag slung over one shoulder. "I have your headphones if you need them," he says to Adam as they head down the sidewalk. "It's probably gonna get loud once more people start coming out."

"Okay," Adam says brightly, swinging his and Hannibal's hand between them as they walk. He's humming softly, some song Hannibal doesn't know. Perhaps not any song at all, something he made up entirely. Mischa used to do that, he remembers, used to dream up little songs that made no sense. Their nanny used to write them down for her, as if she were some great musician with her own personal scribe. Hannibal doesn't remember their nanny's name. She was always simply "Nanny" to the children, and they never bothered to ask. Nanny died that horrible winter, with Mr. Jakov, and Father, and Mother, and Mischa. And Hannibal never knew her name.

"Do you remember the routine we talked about?" Will asks.

Adam nods. With the air of someone reciting an oft-repeated lesson, he replies, "We're gonna walk around, and if a house has a light on or people outside, we can go up and say 'trick or treat' and get candy."

"What else?" Will prompts gently.

Adam's nose scrunches up in thought. "Say 'thank you' if they give us candy. And if I get tired or scared or things get too much, we can go back to Papa's house and have quiet time."

Hannibal still isn't quite used to being addressed as or referred to as Papa. Adam, thus far, casually alternates between "Papa" and "Hamble" seemingly at random, but every time he says it, the appellation still sends a little jolt of pleasant surprise through him like a static shock.

"And?"

Adam frowns, clearly thinking hard. "And… stay close to Daddy and Papa?"

Will smiles, proud and indulgent. "Good boy."

"We practiced," Adam informs Hannibal seriously. "What to say and all that."

"Very clever of you," Hannibal replies.

It's still light out, the warm golden tone of an autumn afternoon starting to bleed into evening. According to Will, who evidently does research on such things, the official trick-or-treat hours for Hannibal's neighborhood — apparently, individual cities and even neighborhoods have publicly-available official hours for trick-or-treating — start at six-thirty. The air is still relatively warm, just a whiff of chill starting to seep into the breeze, and colorful leaves scatter the sidewalk.

"Remember, lamb," Will says, "people are probably gonna ask you about your costume, and you'll have to explain."

Adam shoots Will a skeptical look. "Don't be silly, Daddy," he replies, and uses the hand not holding onto Hannibal to gesture towards the two of them. "Look at us. We look the same."

Will laughs. "Of course. I should have known."

They've come to the end of a walkway, the first one with the light next to the door turned on. There is an inflatable skeleton in the front yard, posed like he's giving a jaunty wave. For all his enthusiasm, Adam hesitates, chewing on his bottom lip.

"Do you want to go up by yourself, or do you want one of us to go with you?" Will asks.

Adam squeezes Hannibal's hand. "Will you come with me?"

"Of course," Hannibal answers, without even thinking.

While Will waits on the sidewalk, Hannibal and Adam walk up the path to the door. The door opens before they reach it, the woman inside wearing a witch's hat and a wide smile, with a bowl of candy in her hands. "Hannibal Lecter," she calls, voice bright with merriment, "I never thought I'd see you trick-or-treating."

"Hello, Mrs. de Laurentiis," Hannibal offers her a bemused smile. "I have been asked to accompany someone this year."

Mrs. de Laurentiis nods her head. "And who is this fine young gentleman?"

Adam seems to have regained a little confidence at the realization that Hannibal knows the woman with the candy. "I'm Adam," he says brightly, "Hamble's my friend. I'm dressed as him." A beat passes, and then, as if remembering, he says, "Trick or treat," and sticks out his bucket.

Mrs. de Laurentiis laughs and drops a handful of candy into his bucket. "It's wonderful to meet you. Happy Halloween."

"Thank you," Adam says politely.

"And Happy Halloween," Hannibal adds.

Back on the sidewalk, Adam releases Hannibal's hand to skip ahead a little, humming happily. Hannibal's hand feels oddly empty, as strange as that seems, without Adam's little palm warm in his. Until Will reaches over and takes it, shooting him a secretive little smile.

This is normal. They are allowed this. Just taking their child trick-or-treating like any other family.

As time ticks on, more families start appearing, the sidewalks bustling with little superheroes and animals, and various pop culture figures, only some of whom Hannibal recognizes. After a while, it grows noisy enough for Adam to put on his noise-canceling headphones.

Ahead, Hannibal watches a little boy dressed as a snowman. He's around Adam's age, and holding the hand of a toddler in a blue princess dress. He seems to explain the ritual to her, and coaxes her up to any doors that seem to frighten her. Hannibal is strangely reminded of Lecter Castle, holding Mischa back from running at the black swans that lived on the pond, using sticks to intimidate them into leaving her be, while his sister hid behind him.

Mischa used to drape her blanket around her shoulders like a cape, letting it drag on the floor behind her, playing at being a fairy queen. Part of her had always seemed, to Hannibal, not meant for the human world. She was better, more pure, elevated above the realm of men. (Or is that hindsight, her tragically young death making her forever innocent and ethereal in his recollection?)

Hannibal thinks Mischa would have liked Halloween, if it had been something practiced when and where they were children. (He almost thinks *if she were still here,* and then stops himself. If she were here now, Mischa would not be trick-or-treating. She would be older than Will. She might have been a wife by now, might have had children of her own. How strange a thought, when she is a permanent child in his mind).

After that first house, Adam seems to have worked up the courage to venture up unfamiliar paths on his own. Hannibal and Will wait on the sidewalk, observing carefully. Will tells him about Halloween, scattered bits and pieces of lore and urban legend. And personal history. Will had never gone trick-or-treating as a child. Even if his father kept him in one place through October, Beau Graham could never afford to buy a costume or be bothered to help make one. And, in any case, they rarely had neighbors close enough, or friendly enough, to make going door-to-door a possibility.

(They have no close-by neighbors in Wolf Trap, either, and yet Will drives roughly an hour and a half every Halloween so Adam can have the experience.)

"That house had a nice… what's the word?" Adam scrunches up his nose. "Not radio, but it sounds like radio. It's the… the mix of things."

"Ratio?" Hannibal offers, amused.

"Yes. Ratio." Adam beams. "That house had a nice ratio of fruity candy and chocolatey candy. It was even."

Will laughs, and it sends a flood of warmth into Hannibal's gut, like a sip of hot spiced cider.

As the sidewalks become more crowded, Adam sticks closer to them, keeping near to avoid the other groups of people also trick-or-treating. At one point, his plastic jack-o-lantern

bucket fills, and he is obliged to empty it into the tote bag Will carries. Twilight has started to fall, sunlight fading and temperature dropping. Hannibal is thankful that his and Adam's suits are, though made of different materials, both warm. Will, for his part, is wearing a thick, dark blue sweater that doubtlessly keeps him comfortably warm. And it happens to make the color of his eyes pop beautifully.

Suddenly, Adam comes to a stop, freezing in place. Will and Hannibal almost bump into him, it's so abrupt. When Hannibal looks down, Adam looks petrified. His eyes are huge, his breathing has sped up, and his body seems locked in place.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asks.

Will looks ahead and makes a face. "There's a clown," he sighs, "Adam's terrified of clowns."

Hannibal looks. A few feet ahead of them is a young man — a teenager, or perhaps a college student, it's difficult to tell with his face caked in makeup — dressed as a clown, handing out candy at the end of his walkway. Adam whimpers, grabbing Will's sleeve.

"You're okay," Will says immediately, his tone soft and soothing. "He's not gonna hurt you, sweetheart. He's just a guy in a costume, like everybody else."

Adam whines faintly, still not budging. His eyes seem glued to the young man, even as he physically cringes away, leaning back into Hannibal and Will's legs to put as much distance between the clown and himself as possible.

Will nods, letting out a quiet huff of air. "Okay," he says to nothing in particular. Then, to Hannibal, he says, "Hold this," and hands him the tote bag.

Hannibal takes the bag without question, putting the straps over his shoulder. Once he's not holding anything, Will scoops Adam up, balancing the boy on his hip. Immediately, Adam loops his arms around Will's neck, burying his face in the crook where Will's neck meets his shoulder.

(For just a moment, all Hannibal can see is his parents — Mischa in their mother's arms, their father pushing Hannibal behind him when the men forced their way in).

"You wanna go back to Hannibal's?" Will asks. Adam mumbles something Hannibal can't make out, and Will nods. "Forward march," he says to Hannibal wryly.

They make their way past the house with the clown, Will rubbing Adam's back and murmuring to him softly the whole time. A few feet beyond the clown house, Will stops and sets Adam back on his feet.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asks again. He feels oddly helpless. He has helped patients work through phobias before (and, in certain cases, subtly encouraged or exacerbated them for his own amusement), but he's somehow at a loss when it comes to helping a child who has somehow wormed his way into Hannibal's heart.

Adam nods, lifting his chin and squaring his little shoulders. It's a familiar motion — Hannibal has seen Will do the same at least a dozen times. His eyes are a little shinier than he would probably like them to be, but he slips his free hand into Hannibal's. And on they go.

Half an hour later, Adam's feet have started to drag. He keeps releasing Hannibal's hand to rub at his eyes, but stubbornly insists that he is *not* too tired to keep going.

"You're gonna tucker yourself out and overwhelm yourself," Will warns gently.

"'m *fine,"* Adam retorts, despite the fact that his words are starting to slur.

"Adam." Will stops walking and crouches down to Adam's level. "I know you've been having a good time, and you don't want it to be over. But I can tell you're sleepy, and if we keep going, it's gonna stop being fun for you and it's gonna be too much for you. Remember why I get to make the big calls?"

Adam nods sullenly.

"Can you tell me, so I know you know?" Will prompts.

Adam, staring resolutely at the concrete, mumbles, "'Cause it's your job to make sure I stay healthy and safe."

Will brushes a hand over Adam's hair — After all the movement he's done, the gel flattening his curls has started to wear off, stray curls popping up here and there around the band of his headphones. "And, as the person who's job it is to take care of you, I'm saying we're calling it a night. Okay?"

Adam grumbles wordlessly, but nods. Abruptly, he shoves his jack-o-lantern candy bucket into Will's hands (a little more roughly than Hannibal would personally consider acceptable), and holds his arms up towards Hannibal. Hannibal picks him up without thinking about it.

On the walk back to the brownstone, Adam falls asleep, head on Hannibal's shoulder. Will changes him into the pajamas he'd brought along, still asleep, and tucks him into the bed of Hannibal's guest room. While he waits in the main bedroom, Hannibal contemplates. He cannot visit whatever grave Mischa might have, not ever. He doesn't know if his parents or the servants who had died with them even have any sort of graves. Still, despite decades of him not acknowledging the rituals of his homeland's holiday, it suddenly feels imperative to do something; if only to put the memories to rest that seem to keep slipping under the cracks of the closed doors in his memory palace.

As Will slips into bed with him, Hannibal murmurs, "There are traditions of my own I would like to share with you."

On November second, Will and Adam join Hannibal for dinner, with a fourth plate and a candle laid out on the table.

Chapter End Notes

Adam dressing as Hannibal for Halloween was one of the first headcanons I developed for this AU, but it took me this long to actually write it all out.

In “Hannibal Rising”, the Lecter family fled their castle during the Blitzkrieg and spent two years living in a hunting cabin with the children’s nanny and Hannibal’s tutor, Boris Jakov. Hannibal’s parents died in a bombing. I think Mr. Jakov and the nanny died in the same bombing, but I don’t remember exactly. I haven’t hammered out the exact details of Mischa and the Lecter parents’ deaths in my universe, but I’m choosing to make it canon that Nanny and Mr. Jakov were with them when it happened, and also died.

I did research into tips for trick-or-treating with autistic children, and a lot of them were at least mentioned in this chapter. (Headphones, “practicing”, having a routine, having a safe place to retreat to unwind, etc). Hannibal’s neighbor Mrs. de Laurentiis is a reference to/inspired by Martha de Laurentiis, who was a producer on the show, as well as the “Hannibal” and “Red Dragon” movies. Sadly, she passed away in 2021. The kids Hannibal watches are dressed as Olaf and Elsa, and they’re inspired by a pair of siblings I saw while at a Halloween party that involved handing out candy.

The Lithuanian holiday of Vėlinės takes place on November 2nd (All Saints Day in the Catholic… calendar or whatever), and it’s a day of remembering and honoring the dead. According to my research, Vėlinės traditions include things like visiting and cleaning the graves of the dead, symbolically inviting your ancestors/deceased relatives to your meals, and even leaving food on graves. I figured the meal thing would be something Hannibal would be willing to do again, eventually.

I truly wasn't expecting Mischa (and thereby Hannibal's past) to be highkey haunting the narrative of this chapter, but that's the direction my muse went. I think it was something about the time of year/growing closer with Adam/being in a situation where he's surrounded by children.

Lastly... I'm aware it's been a while. I apologize for that. I was putting a lot of pressure on myself in regards to this series, and it kind of killed my motivation/muse to write. I would get my heart set on posting a certain thing at a certain time (for example, I really wanted to get an "Adam's birthday" chapter out on my headcanon of Adam's birthday), and when I missed those self-imposed deadlines, I would beat myself up about it. I'm trying to ease up on my expectations for myself and focus on simply putting out content I'm proud of that makes me happy. I hope this chapter makes up for the long wait, and thank you for understanding.

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